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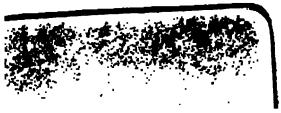

PLAIN SERMONS

PREACHED AT

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BY

JAMES GALLOWAY COWAN,

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SERMON I.

DEPENDENCE UPON GOD.

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The Lord is at hand. Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto GOD.

"THE LORD is at hand." It is doubtful whether this admonition is designed to recommend the foregoing precept, "Let your moderation be known unto all men," or whether it introduces and enforces the injunction, "Be careful for nothing." It may well do both: on the one hand, exhorting the disciples to lead (and that manifestly) an unworldly life, seeing they were so shortly to be taken out of the world; and, on the other hand, cheering them in their sorrows, suppressing their anxieties and quickening their faith, by the remembrance, that comfort, and peace, and perfect bliss would soon be theirs —"The LORD is at hand."

The second advent of our LORD was always in the mind of the apostles. It is thought that they even counted upon its literal occurrence in their lifetime, as though the prophecies of it were among the things to be fulfilled before that generation passed away. Without subscribing to this view, against which many objections may be taken, it may be readily admitted that, as they were uncertain how soon it might happen, as they had no ground for concluding that it would *not* be in their time, so they rightly laboured to impress upon the disciples its *possible*, if you will its *probable* nearness. Besides, they knew that, virtually, it would be soon: for if CHRIST came not speedily in the flesh, speedily they would be called out of the flesh to Him, and then would cease the pleasures and cares of this world, and then would begin the possession and enjoyment of things eternal. How necessary then, that they who were but pilgrims and strangers here, living a life that was soon to be ended and accounted for, should be warned against excess of worldliness, against building houses where they were but permitted to pitch tents, against turning aside out of the path of pilgrimage, and wasting or abusing the time for journeying! How cheering, too, for those who were perplexed, or burthened,

or afflicted, to be reminded that perplexity, and toil, and grief were only passing clouds, and mere inconveniences by the way—that soon they should be rid of them altogether, and should only be allowed to remember them to magnify their appreciation of attained rest and glory! And here let me observe, that the admonition "Be careful for nothing," is not in this place a reproof of the worldling, coming across him in the path of mammon worship, of earthly aggrandisement, of forgetfulness of eternity, of GOD, of heaven, but is rather a consolation, an encouragement, for those, who while walking, or endeavouring to walk, in the right way, are depressed and hindered by trials, and perplexities, and afflictions. There are cares which man makes for himself, for which he is to be blamed, whereof he deserves to eat the bitter fruit. There are other cares which he suffers involuntarily, which GOD imposes upon him as discipline, which Satan thrusts upon him as temptations. With regard to the last, the Christian's cares, St. Paul offers advice and consolation, saying in effect—Sink not beneath them, poor pilgrim; groan not on account of them; let them not distract your aims and desires from the right object of solicitude and hope. Weigh them in the right scales against the glories

that are coming, and they will surely be found light. Measure them beside the joys of eternity, and they will be seen to be brief and transitory. "The LORD is at hand" to relieve you of them all, at His second advent, by the unclothing of death, by carrying you to Paradise. Be comforted, rejoice, rouse ye, and, without distraction, pursue your hopeful course. "Be careful for nothing."

We know the force of such an exhortation in earthly things. We know by experience how light is the labour which leads to rest, how possible it is to smile through present tears at the prospect of coming joy; what pains, and self-denials, and dangers, and encounters, are readily embraced by those whom ambition prompts, and approval cheers, and reward awaits. Nothing is too hard to bear, nothing too dear to relinquish, nothing too formidable to meet, nothing too much to do; the hands that hung down are lifted up, the sorrow is banished, the toil becomes pleasure, we rush to the fight, we delight in the race, forgetting the past, disregarding the present, hastening onward to the future, the rest, the victory, the prize, the glory. It is easy, then—not altogether, but comparatively—to obey the precept, "Be careful for nothing" in view of the prospect, "The LORD is at hand."

But, after all, I cannot but think that something better than a prospect is hinted at in the text. The apostle goes on to urge, "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto GOD." He does not say, "Make light of present cases, on account of coming consolation." He does not bid the downcast lift up their eyes to the hills, whence by and by cometh their help. It is not "Bear, endure, encounter in hope," but, "Get rid of what burthens you, by laying it upon Him, Who is near, by your side now, to take it. Be careful for nothing; put every care upon GOD (the LORD who is at hand to take it), by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving." I say this is something better than a prospect; better, because of its superior influence, and better, because of the immediate relief. The teaching of Advent, all important as it is, too often affects but little such poor creatures of the present as we are. We are exhorted to look back to the first coming of CHRIST, to see what He suffered and did for us, what a foundation He laid for us to build on. We are exhorted to look forward to the second advent, to consider what CHRIST will do, to anticipate the glorious completion of us in Him as the building of GOD. We obey, and we are

moved to faint gratitude for the one, to faint hope of the other. The retrospect and the prospect considered, we both see from what rock we were hewn, and into how beautiful a fabric we shall be fashioned; and, unless we are very incapable of feeling, in the view of past and future, we strive to accept thankfully and to sanctify duly the present. But, oh! how little constraining is the influence of a Saviour who *once* visited the earth, of a Judge who shall *by and by* visit it! How dim is the remembrance of long past mercies! how distant is the prospect of heavenly consolations! Earth is now present with all its attractions and rewards. The world, the flesh, and the devil are now assailing and afflicting us with their many temptations. How can we resist the seen, and heard, and felt fascinations? How can we fill up the present void, and lull the present pain, and endure the pressing trial, by proposing to ourselves the hopes of the future? Does the promise of food to-morrow fill the hungry to-day? Does the sight of the physician's prescription on the instant stay the pain and progress of inflammation? Will a drowning man float till by and by a rope is brought and thrown to him? Will a discomfited army rally and conquer, because reinforcements at some future time

will reach the field? In each of these cases, the prospect will have *some* influence, but will it be adequate to the occasion? Must not the present be met by the present? Do we not need, besides a Saviour of the past, and a Judge of the future, a LORD of the present? Yes, verily, and we are assured that we have Him in the words, "The LORD is at hand," and advised how to avail ourselves of Him in what follows, "Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto GOD."

We are too apt to have but a religion of the future; to forget that there is *at hand* a LORD and Helper; to act as though the first opportunity of serving GOD were in the hour of death, as though the blessings of reward and favour were only to be had in heaven; to treat GOD, in short, as if He were only the GOD of a future world. Such teaching as that of the text reproves and corrects us. As other passages of Holy Writ instruct us to make GOD the aim of this present life, using life as an apprentice-time to the profession of Christianity, as a season wherein to prove ourselves and be proved, and to set forth His glory; "Whether we live, we live unto the LORD." "Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory

of GOD;" so the text bids us make GOD the guide and supporter of this life. "In everything by prayer, with supplication, and thanksgiving, let your requests be made known as to GOD. And the peace of GOD, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through CHRIST JESUS."

This is what we want to feel and act upon, that GOD is a GOD at hand, and not a GOD afar off; that we may *now* cast all our care upon Him, knowing that He careth for us; that if we lay our burthen upon the LORD, He will *now* sustain us: that if we commit our way unto Him, He will bring it to pass; that He waits to be gracious, not till this life is over, but only till we make known our requests, till we pray and supplicate, and give thanks. In proportion as we do not realise and act upon these assurances, we are blind to many of the charms, and insensible to many of the helps and comforts of our holy religion: we frustrate, too, the fulfilment in ourselves of the truth, that godliness has the promise of the life that now is: we run the risk of becoming earthly-minded, of being swallowed up of overmuch sorrow, of being cumbered with many cares, of being snared away and taken captive by the devil, of making shipwreck of our faith.

O brethren, do not suppose that GOD only dwells on the margin of the haven, that we are left to steer our course, to buffet with the waves, to struggle against the storm, to repair the shivered mast, to stop the leakages, to sail into the harbour, and let down the anchor, and disembark upon the shore before He meets us. With Him as our Captain we are to set out. He as our pilot must guide us. He must rule the waves and bring us through them. The way is His, as the haven is His; unless He is with us throughout the first, we shall never reach the last. Grace is no reserved blessing. Heaven is no distant home. Grace is ever to be had if we will seek it. Heaven is everywhere, if we will but realise it, for where GOD is, is heaven.

But GOD is not manifest to all. His help is not given unsought. The eye of faith alone can see Him, the cry of faith alone be heard. As He will be served for reward, so will He be asked for grace: we must be alert to see what help we want; we must be prompt to seek it. We must acknowledge Him, or He will not guide us. We must cast our care upon Him, or He will not take it. Unless we are careful for nothing, because we have committed our cares to Him, we must be full of cares, harassed by them, troubled,

afflicted, distressed; or, being careless, we shall be deemed worthless, and left to drift upon shoals and into quicksands, and to sink in the gulf of destruction.

Do I speak to those who are careful for many things? I do not mean those who are concerning themselves about worldly schemes, who would increase their wealth, their power, or their pleasure, who, regarding earth as their home, and resolving to make the most of it, are laying themselves out for many days, proposing to pull down their barns and build greater, to make to themselves a name, who are intent upon what they shall eat and drink, and wherewithal they shall be clothed, how they shall get their full of pleasure, how they shall cull all the advantages, and avoid all the disagreeables of life. As the minister of God, I have nothing to do with these, further than to cry out upon their folly and their sin, and to warn them that unless they repent and relinquish their cares, they shall be consumed by them. But do I speak to those who setting before them as the business of life, the service of God, as the end of life, the glory of heaven, are yet, by personal infirmity, by peculiar exigencies, and difficulties, and anxieties, by a frowning or fascinating world, by the wiles of Satan or by any other

means, so troubled, so distracted, so drawn off from the pursuit of their object, and the entertaining of their hopes, that they find themselves carnal when they would be spiritual, standing still when they would be moving on, clinging to earth when they would be rising to heaven, waging war when they would be enjoying peace? Do I speak to those whose weak and carnal nature will not be enlisted in the hearty pursuit of godliness; whose crying temporal wants distract, and deafen, and deaden the yearnings of their better nature; whose occupation in the world seems to contend, and too successfully, for the best of their thoughts and aims, whose natural losses and deprivations sadden and absorb them, creating a void which they cannot fill, taking away a guide whom they used to look to, a support upon which they were wont to lean; whose patient labours in well-doing have failed of success; whose good is evil spoken of; whose many cares to train aright the children whom God gave them, have been repaid by waywardness; whose conscientious well-doing has brought upon them what should rather be the reward of ungodliness; who, in short, have not found in religion what they hoped for and honestly sought, and who cannot render to religion what they would? Do I speak to these? Well! I ask,

Have you sought to get rid of care, by casting it upon the LORD? or have you rather asked human counsel, and leant upon human support, and hewn out for yourselves cisterns, and built for yourselves a refuge, instead of running into the refuge of GOD? Have you animated yourselves only by the thought of distant help, of future peace? Have you lost sight of the LORD at hand, the GOD of Providence, knowing, causing or assenting to, and waiting to guide, as you ask or ask not, the circumstances which try you? Have you realised that nothing happens but by His consent, and that His consent is given or withheld, not by what He sees of you, but by what He hears from you? Do you pray—not simply uttering certain words put into your mouths in Church formularies, or books of private devotion, not framing acts of general adoration, of vague acknowledgments of dependence and prayer for blessings, but presenting yourselves, in the utterance of your own feelings, as in all things the servants of His will, the dependents and petitioners of His grace? Do you supplicate? Is each ascertained want laid before Him in all its detail? Is every hindrance, every difficulty, every desire made known to Him as soon as perceived by yourselves? Is your care

cast upon Him? Is He besought to take it, to relieve you of it, to tell you what to do respecting it? Can you say of all that now tries you, that nothing is uncommunicated to Him, no relief, no guidance unsought? And do you in everything give thanks. Ah, here, brethren, is the test! Here doubtless will many of you, who are clear hitherto, be obliged to plead guilty. You do not give thanks. You recognise GOD as Him from whom you may seek all. You do not sufficiently acknowledge what you have received. Of many special gifts, of power to bear with many trials, of guidance in various difficulties, of blessings continued and troubles not made worse (an important item), you make no acknowledgment. You know of many blessings for which you ought to be grateful: you may guess at many more, and besides there are many which you do not know, and cannot guess at, which yet doubtless have been poured out upon you, or at least have not been taken away from you. What of these? What of everything good in itself, or capable of being made good? What of the temptations, what of the afflicting providences of which you are the objects? You do not think, perhaps, that these are things to be grateful for: but, remember, the command is, "In everything with

thanksgiving." Yes, the prayer, without the thanksgiving, is not prayer. It is only part dependence. It asks, it does not acknowledge. It does not rejoice that GOD is yet operating; that He is chastening if He is not rewarding; that therefore, you are still the creatures of His providence, and may hope for blessing if you do not frustrate it.

O mend all that is amiss, quicken all that is slow, revive all that is ready to perish. The LORD is at hand. Cast all your care upon Him. Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not to your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to GOD. See Him by faith Who is invisible to natural eye. Lean on Him Whom the arm of flesh cannot touch. Speak to Him in all your circumstances of weal or woe, of trial or blessing. Pray to Him for what you want, and acknowledge all that you receive, of whatever kind, and ask Him what use to make of it. So rid yourselves of your cares, and then—I do not say that you shall be left without trials, for GOD does not promise that, rather does He lead us to expect trials as the signs and pledges of His love,

but I do say that He will give you nothing, and leave you nothing, but what is good for your personal happiness and your eternal interest, and that in every trial, whether sent by Him, or allowed to be inflicted by the agents of evil, He will give you support, and guidance, and ardent hope, and abundant consolation; yea, He will bestow on you His peace which passeth understanding, and which, whatever your circumstances, shall assuredly keep your hearts and minds through CHRIST JESUS, unto eternal salvation.

SERMON II.

JUDGMENT HERE AND HEREAFTER.

MALACHI, II., 17.

Where is the God of Judgment?

THE prophet had been complaining of the priests for neglecting to inform and correct the people, and of the people for disregarding GOD'S teaching. Reasoning and remonstrating with them, and supposing them to attempt self-justification, he tells them at last that they have wearied the LORD with their words—by which he means their acted and thought words rather than what they spoke—and in answer to the question, which he knows they would put, "Wherein have we wearied Him?" he says, By presuming licentiously that GOD is indifferent alike to good and evil, and has no moral likings or dislikings—"When ye say every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and He delighteth in them,"—or, if it were otherwise, that at least He does

not act upon His feeling—"Where is the GOD of Judgment?" the manifestation of the discriminating, the rewarding, or punishing LORD. I do not propose to enlarge upon the text in its historic relation to the Jews, but, applying it to ourselves, to show, first, that the question, "Where is the GOD of Judgment?" is one which we Christians often ask in perverse unbelief, or in sad infirmity; and, secondly, that the question is one which in a better sense we should often ask (as we do not), in order to discern His operations, to become acquainted and impressed with the truth, that there is a judgment of all, *here* and *hereafter*.

"Where is the GOD of Judgment?" I say that this question is often asked in perverse unbelief, or in sad infirmity. Practically, we too often ignore the idea of judgment altogether. Our reason suggests to us, that if there is a moral governor of the world, then surely good will be approved by reward, and evil marked by punishment. The Bible plainly and most positively assures us, that, as rational and responsible creatures of GOD's hand, we are subject to a judgment which His goodness, His truth, His justice, His holiness, cannot omit to pass on our every act, and word, and thought; that as purchased servants of CHRIST, we are set a certain work to do,

with the express understanding that we shall be faithfully dealt with according to our treatment of that work, and are put upon a probation whereof at the end CHRIST *must* take account, for He has been made LORD and Judge for that very end, and has received a commission from the Father, which He may in no single instance depart from. Yea, more than that, it tells us that the immediate effect on us, of all our good and evil, is *itself* a judgment, contributing to the formation of the character which shall adapt us, and so consign us, to heaven or to hell. I say reason and the Bible so instructs us; and yet we practically ignore the judgment. Of course I do not mean that we strike it out of our creed, that we do otherwise than assent to it in theory, that we altogether forget it in practice, but that we do not make it the ruling principle of our lives—the impelling or restraining influence of every thought and deed. Am I not right? Reflect, dear brethren, how many wrong things you do or desire, with little hesitation, with no compunction, with no fear of judgment! Reflect, too, how many good things you pass over or forego, or will take no trouble to attain, through want of consideration of the reward that belongs to them, and which therefore you are losing! How ready are

you to taste each cup of pleasure, to be engrossed with the pursuits of this world, to withhold what you should part with, to do what is wrong, to omit what is enjoined, in forgetfulness of the fact that for all these things GOD will bring you unto judgment! How impatient, too, under trials, how slow in spiritual work, how little interested in the love and attainment of godliness; as though these things were all loss, and suffering, and uninviting toil; as though there were no recompense of reward! Yes, there is something in the best of us, and much in the most of us, of practical disregard of judgment. Of course we know (and are in a measure influenced by the knowledge) that by and by we shall stand before GOD, to be blessed or cursed—that it is necessary, therefore, to secure a good hope of acceptance, and to make our peace with GOD through JESUS CHRIST, and that this is to be done by keeping all the ordinances of religion, and obeying in spirit the whole moral code, and striving to love and serve the LORD now; or at least by repenting of all that is amiss, and praying earnestly for pardon and quickening of our faith, before we die. But still, it is not a *judgment* that we contemplate—a real scrutiny of our life's ways—an actual weighing of us in the heavenly balance, that we may be rewarded or

punished for those ways, and accepted or rejected according to our actual state. We are wont to consider GOD as an arbitrary Being, not absolutely bound by any laws, or promises, or threats, but free to treat us as He will, and disposed, for CHRIST'S sake, to be favourable to us—if we ask Him—without any regard to what we have been doing, and what we actually are. I am not sure that you will admit this. But, brethren, to help you to do so, consider how general is a vague trust to CHRIST'S merits—and GOD'S goodness on account of those merits—to cover all excesses and defects of duty, to accept any kind of character, as though there were no rule of reward, and no necessary qualification for heaven! How rare is the conviction, that while CHRIST'S merits are indeed the only ground of our acceptance, and GOD'S mercy is exercised on account of those merits, yet the merits and the mercy are applied to us on condition that we do certain works, and attain to a certain character in the strength of the Holy Spirit given to incline and enable us; that we are to be rewarded or punished, accepted or rejected, strictly according to the terms of that condition, and that the inquiry into its observance, in the scrutiny of our past lives and of our present state, in the pronouncing of them such as they were

appointed to be, or the opposite, and the bestowal of the reward or punishment, is a strict judgment, in the passing of which the Judge has no room for arbitrary favour, no option, if I may so speak, to do otherwise than, in view of the evidence, to apply the fixed law—life for those whom it approves, death for those whom it condemns.

Oh! there IS a GOD of Judgment, and to us Christians there is no other GOD. CHRIST is full of merits. GOD accepts those merits, and is full of mercy on account of them. We cannot magnify the merits too much, nor rejoice too much in the mercy; provided (but provided only) that we remember that they are applied by rule, and that we must observe the rule, and be sure that GOD will in no wise, and in no case, depart from it. Trust to CHRIST'S merits; hope for GOD'S mercy, but count most surely on judgment, as you are most surely the objects of it.

But, secondly, fully believing that there is a GOD of Judgment, the questions arise, Where is He? In what court does He sit? When does He judge? The common notion (and my remarks have hitherto fallen in with it) is, that He is only in a future world, and that He will not exercise His office till the last day. The notion is founded on a truth. CHRIST sits on the throne of GOD

now, to send down grace, to intercede with the Father, to rule the Church. At the last day, and not before, He will leave that throne, and come forth in His glorious majesty to judge the quick and the dead, and to dispose of them in their appointed eternal abodes. We have a work to do, and a day set us to do it in, and account will not be taken of it, and the hire given us, till the day is over. There is a character to be formed ere we can enter heaven, and space, and opportunity, and power, are vouchsafed us for forming it. Respecting these, then, judgment tarrieth. And even when our individual time is over, when our work ceases, and our probation closes, there are others left to work and fashion themselves for eternity; and God has appointed that we, without them, shall not be made perfect. There is to be but one glorious descent from the throne, one general resurrection, one great assize, one gathering of the saints into the highest heaven, one opening, and then one shutting for ever of the lowest hell. When our day is over, we must, probably, as others do, sleep a night in the grave, and then on the morning of the Resurrection shall appear the God of Judgment. But surely, after all, there must be an earlier judgment! When the body is laid down, and begins its

sleep, the soul does not lie down and sleep with it. "The body returns to the dust," we are told, "but the spirit goes back to GOD who gave it;" and lest we should imagine that this is but a figurative way of describing a suspension of the spirit's life, we are informed in many places not only that it continues greatly alive and awake, requiring a place of conscious abode, but that it is at once disposed of by GOD, and in a manner which shows an immediate judgment of it. As soon as Lazarus died, he was carried to Abraham's bosom, and there was comforted: as soon as Dives died, in hell (a place of misery of some kind) he lift up his eyes, being in torments. "This day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise," was the promise of Him, Who could not promise idly. To be absent from the body is, for the saint, to be present with the LORD, and a vision showed St. John the souls of the martyrs living and pleading beneath the altar. What does all this teach us, but that the GOD of Judgment meets us at the gate of death, and there and then judges and disposes of us? It is somewhat speculative to inquire what is the nature of the judgment. It is beyond us to understand how an immediate judgment is compatible with a future one. We know not whether GOD at first privately intimates what He will at last publicly

pronounce; whether this is the actual, that only the formal decision; whether the scrutiny is now made, or only rehearsed; whether the soul is actually tried, or only committed for trial, and in the mean time so dealt with by immediate imprisonment, or liberation on pledge to appear, as to hint, rather than plainly declare what shall be its ultimate fate; whether it enters at once into a state of actual, though partial, experience of joy or misery, companying with GOD, with CHRIST, with holy angels, or with Satan and evil spirits; or whether it is left in an antechamber where it but anticipates the future reward, and actually receives none of it. All this is mystery. But certain we are, brethren, that death is in some sense the time of judgment, and consequently that in some way, at the very moment of departure from this life we are confronted with the GOD of Judgment. Oh, that we could feel this! What a precious time and talent it would make our life; what an awful antechamber of GOD'S presence! How we should be deterred from doing evil; how stirred to do good! How should we be watching, staff in hand; how resolutely should we do our work, how patiently should we suffer! Could we then be at home in the world, prone to sinful pleasures, distracted or engrossed

by worldly cares, indifferent to sin and holiness? No, it would be impossible! Could we be idle, if we knew that our work would so soon be scrutinised? Could we delay the cultivation of a grace necessary for heaven, if we knew that the time for acquiring it might so soon be over? Could we hazard the interests of eternity, if we knew that we were separated from them, not by a wide and lasting world, not by many, many years of forgetfulness in the grave, but only by a thin veil, through which they might even now be albut heard and seen, which the next moment might be rent in twain, which at the most, in a few short years, will be wholly taken away! Oh! brethren, we can risk our eternal hopes when they seem distant—we dare not, we could not, if we felt them close! Behold, the judge is at the door! Watch, lest it open and reveal Him! Behold the messenger is coming; be ready, for He may be sent to summon you to the presence of the GOD of Judgment!

But we have not yet the full answer to our text. GOD is everywhere. He fills heaven and earth with His presence. And He is the same everywhere, and at all times; the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; and so He is the GOD of Judgment, exercising judgment even in this life.

It cannot be otherwise. It belongs to His very essence to love righteousness and hate iniquity. When He wills, it is done; when He feels, He acts; what He hates, He shrinks from—and if He shrinks, is it not judgment? What He loves, He clings to—and is not His presence favour, and support, and blessing? Brethren, I have often exhorted you not to shut GOD out of this present world as if He belonged only to the future. Live in the world to Him. "Wherever we live, we live unto the LORD." Live in the world by Him. "The LORD is at hand. Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made unto GOD." And live in the world, under Him: for "The eyes of the LORD are over the righteous, and the face of the LORD is against them that do evil." Yes, the GOD of Judgment is *here*. You know it was so in Old Testament times. The deed of righteousness then brought its immediate reward; the deed of sin its punishment. Murmur or disregard drove away the pillar of fire, repentance and prayer brought it back. You think it otherwise now perhaps, but "I am the LORD, I change not." The children of Israel were carnal babes, GOD therefore showed Himself to their natural eye. *We* are men in CHRIST, and the vision,

therefore, is to our faith. It was with perishable toys that *they* were pleased: He, therefore, rewarded or punished them with temporal things. It is differently, *in a measure*, that He deals with us; but not altogether differently. It is a mistake to suppose that GOD'S favour was always testified to the Jews by prosperity, His displeasure by adversity. Think of Abraham, of Job, of Moses, of Joseph, of the ungodly in great prosperity, and you will see the mistake. Temporal circumstances were more often, then, the tokens of spiritual, but the spiritual has always been the reality; and in comparison with it, the token, not always afforded, is immaterial. Oh! do not suppose that when the Man CHRIST JESUS came on earth as the messenger of grace, the GOD of Providence departed. More real and constant is His presence now, and more invariable His action. In respect of our service of CHRIST and candidateship for heaven, there is a sense in which He leaves us unjudged till the end. But, in another sense, as He must, from His very nature, be always judging, so are we Christians the special objects of His judgment. No winking at *our* ignorance, no long-suffering with *our* sin. Enlightened and enabled, we are responsible, and immediately made to answer, for all that is wrong,

and, specially endeared to Him, we are immediately rewarded for all that He approves. And this judgment is visible, if we will but look for it even in our temporal circumstances. I do not say that the righteous are always what the world calls prosperous, and the wicked always what the world calls unfortunate, though that is not seldom the case, much more often than, in our rash judgment, we suppose; besides, any kinds of temporal circumstances may be made, and often are made, the sources of temporal reward or punishment; but temporal things are not the best or the worst that God can give. They are chiefly used by Him as means; and could I describe to you the blessings which poverty and bereavement and disappointment and affliction have produced, and the curses which have accompanied riches and success, and immunity from loss and trial, you would see what effectual means they are, and would readily exclaim, "*Here* is the God of Judgment!" But there is a better and a worse judgment. You know how God hardened Pharaoh's heart, because it was not softened; how He made Saul's perversity his punishment; how He stiffened Jeroboam's arm that he could not draw it in from the deed of sin; what a sinful security He brought upon David for transgression; how Abra-

ham grew rich by forsaking his home; how Job resigned much and therefore received more; how Joseph, fleeing from Potiphar's wife, was made to prosper in all he did. These things are types of great realities—specimens of constant judgments. GOD stands over every man to watch what he does, and as soon as it is done, He judges and rewards it. Ah! let the wicked tremble at this, and let the righteous rejoice at it. A harassed or a calmed conscience may or may not be an accompaniment of the judgment, but a judgment there will surely be. Do you want an illustration? Why, then, should the man who commits a trivial sin to-day fall into a greater sin to-morrow? Why should a little resistance qualify for a great one? You say it is natural. If you mean by that that is *spiritual,* that it is the acting influence of GOD'S providence, I agree with you; but not otherwise. Man is not his own destroyer, nor his own saviour. It no more follows naturally that a man should fall into a great sin after a little one, or should conquer a strong temptation after overcoming a weak one, than that he should soil his garments or his flesh much to-day, because he soiled them a little yesterday, or that he should float in a flood because he has turned aside from a pool! It is a judgment that makes him sin again,

and a judgment that enables him to resist again. In the one case, it is the angry withdrawal of grace, and the giving up to a reprobate mind, and the delivery to Satan; in the other it is the approving increase of grace, and the sending of angels to keep off the fiends. *Where is the* GOD *of Judgment!* Where, brethren, is He not, and when not acting? This world is the throne of judgment. Every moment is the trial time. Every act, every word, every thought, brings down upon it, on the instant, the sentence and the execution of the sentence! Think of this and act upon it. The eyes of the LORD are over the righteous. The face of the LORD is against them that do evil. Strive, then, each action to approve to His all-seeing eye. Know that it is always Advent; that the books are always open, and the judgment always set, and the sentence ever ready, "Blessed—or Cursed," and angels and demons looking out and waiting for the signal of approach. The Last Judgment is the climax of the Death Judgment, the Death Judgment of the Life Judgment. Gain GOD's approval here, and keep it here, and you shall not lose it hereafter. Forfeit it here, and obtain it not again here, and you can never have it. There is no condemnation for them that are in CHRIST JESUS. The rest are already con-

demned; though the GOD of Judgment gives them yet the chance—(oh! let them not trifle with it!) —that if they will appeal quickly, a fresh trial may be granted; and if they have made CHRIST their Advocate, the former sentence shall be reversed, and they, too, shall be blessed!

SERMON III.

THE WORLDLING REPROVED.

ST. JAMES, IV., 13, 14, 15.

Go to now, ye that say, To-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the LORD *will, we shall live, and do this, or that.*

"GO TO." It is the language of rebuke, of remonstrance, and yet of exhortation. "Come, come, what are you doing? cease from it, for it is wrong. Come, let us reason together, ye that are forming worldly schemes, and laying out plans and works for the future, counting not only on *some* continuance, but even on a definite time of your own marking out, 'We will continue there a year.' Come, I say, be wise; consider what your life is, how brief, how fleeting, how easily taken away—how

uncertain of continuance—and rule and consecrate every part of it, every work, every prospective thought, with the limitation, 'If the LORD will.'"

Thus is the worldling reproved and exhorted—the man who is so foolish as to reckon surely upon what he knows is very uncertain, who is so sinful as to forget the providence of GOD, or at least not to submit himself to it. And, further on he is plainly told that this reckless confidence is sin:—"Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."

Observe here, my brethren—and you will thereby see how directly this text is addressed, not to very gross and carnal offenders, but even to such as ourselves—that the Apostle does not cry out against the going into the city and proposing to buy and sell and get gain there, or even against the fixing of a particular period of sojourn; but against the doing of all this *without reference and submission to, without dependence upon the will and providence of* GOD; without remembrance that there is no certainty of life, and power, and opportunity. "What is our life" "If the LORD will?"

GOD does not forbid, rather He requires us to engage in worldly occupations. He has sent us into the world in need of food and raiment, which

the majority of us can only get by working for them, and has endowed us with faculties and powers which have their legitimate exercise in worldly pursuits. There can be no question that by GOD'S appointment man is to labour and trade, or employ himself in some way in worldly things, for sustenance and for exercise of many of his powers. And if this is so, then neither can there be any question, that it must be lawful to think in some way of the morrow, to provide what we shall need in it, to consider and plan for our employment and gain in it. It would be quite impossible to carry on many callings—more especially those which have distinctly the approval of GOD, as husbandry, for instance—if we might not forecast, anticipate, provide, propose, and plan. And if all this may be done, then we may and must mark out particular works and places, and specific periods of time, wherein to perform what we propose. If a husbandman may not think of the harvest, how shall he do the duties of the seed time? If the merchant may not fix on a mart nor make arrangements for sojourning there till he has disposed of his goods, nor count the number of days which the ship will require for transporting them, then how shall he know what wares to purchase? how shall he persuade himself to

have anything to do with merchandise? Surely, he must take for granted—or at least he must act as if he took for granted—some certainty of time and opportunity, and so he must in one sense presume upon the future. Still, brethren, the very illustrations I have chosen tell against counting on actual certainty. The husbandman ploughs in hope and sows in hope; but knows all the time that the fowls of the air may rob him of his crop, that the needful rain or sun may be withholden from it, that the worm, and the mildew, and the blast may destroy it. The merchant freights his vessel with full knowledge—(not always without fear)—that fire or storm may cause it to be lost in the sea, or that if it reaches the place of sale, there may then be no demand for it. Each is obliged to admit contingencies; to prepare and act as if all power and all time and circumstances were in his own hands, while he knows and feels that it is far otherwise; that much may be uncontrollably against him; that he may be disappointed of all his hope. Nor does he omit altogether to provide for the contingency. He asks, "What if I should be disappointed, if my plans should fail, if the time should be prolonged or shortened against my expectation? What is to be done with the gain, if anything happens to me?" So

he insures his vessel, and gives directions whither to carry, or what to do with his merchandise if aught should render it unsaleable at the proposed mart, and he makes his will! Wisely he takes into account what he calls "chance," and therefore sobers his expectations and rules his plans by the consideration of what may happen to frustrate them! A like consideration—not of "chance," for he does not believe in chance, but of the possible unexpected operations of GOD'S providence—is to sanctify the Christian's plans and appointments, and to prevent him from becoming a worldling. He may think and say, what he will do on the morrow; he may set out on a long journey, or propose to himself a week, a month's, a year's, a ten years' sojourn in some distant city; he may make ample and long preparations for buying and selling, and getting gain; he may pull down his barns (if they are not large enough) and build greater; he may entertain some thoughts of possibly enjoying, after years of toil and care, an old age of ease and happiness, and so may make provision for that happiness. He need not, and should not, be ever saying to himself, "It is of no use my undertaking this business, I may not live to carry it out." "If I were sure of life, I would remove this and alter that, but let it be now, it must do

for my poor uncertain days." (The world would stand still, if men were to act, or refuse to act, upon such arguments as these, arguments not suggested by God.) No, brethren, whatever your calling, follow it honestly and heartily; whatever your possessions, use them, and use them so as to get the most legitimate good out of them, and do not despise the opportunities and the goods which GOD has given you. But consider when you propose to yourselves anything which draws by anticipation on the future, consider, I say, "What is my life? It is even a vapour that appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away," and qualify your scheme by saying to yourselves, "If the LORD will, I should live and do this or that." Yes! and provide, as far as you can, *lest the* LORD *should not will.* And here, brethren, we have suggested to us another reason for admitting an "if" into our counsels, and for allowing it to have its say, and for heeding well what it suggests. The Christian is allowed, and even required to follow a worldly calling, but still he has a higher calling, which he must not neglect, which he must most regard. Life was not given him only that he might eat and drink, and take his pleasure, and grow rich, and build palaces, and be filled with knowledge, and perfected in accomplishments.

These are but the lower employments of life, or its intermittent pastimes. Its business is religion —the laying hold on salvation, and following the holy service to which we are bound, wherein we are apprentices and probationers for eternal glory, and whereby we are allowed and enabled to lay up treasure in heaven—the dedication of ourselves to CHRIST our Saviour, to live under His rule, and by His grace; to set forth His glory in all we do; to become qualified by unlearning and renouncing what is amiss, and acquiring new tastes, and inclinations, and powers, and fashioning ourselves after His glorious image for the state to which He will call us when this life is over. "If the LORD will I should live and do this or that." How does such a suggestion break in upon and check the presuming worldliness of the called of GOD! "Here am I," it makes him exclaim, "actually laying myself out for the engrossing and long-continued pursuit of worldly ends. Yet GOD may cut short my life in the midst of it, and if He does, without giving me time to resume my higher calling, to repair what is out of order, to fill up what is wanting, to make my peace with Him, to become fit for death—oh, to what in that case will my folly and my sin bring me! How shall I stand before Him at His awful Advent?

What account shall I render of my neglected stewardship? What will justify my presumption in His delay? What excuse my want of the wedding garment? Surely He will deal with me as with one who knew his Master's will, yet did it not; who refused the glory which he was created, and redeemed, and sanctified to render; who has preferred Mammon to GOD, earth to heaven; who has contracted the worldliness from which GOD shrinks, and despised the holiness which alone He will accept! It is an awakening, a sobering, a solemn suggestion. It reveals to him the anomaly, the folly, the sin, the peril of his condition, whatever the kind of worldliness which engrosses him. He a servant of CHRIST, a votary of religion, a worker for eternity, an heir of glory, forgetting his calling, neglecting his best hopes and interests, perverting his time and powers, and opportunities from their highest and most necessary use, to gratify self with childish pleasures, to heap up gold, to make to himself a name among the pigmies of the earth; to become admired or stared at for his appearance or accomplishments; to excel in knowledge of languages, or sciences, or history, or for any other earthly end; when not only what he seeks must soon be yielded up (even if he succeeds in getting it), but

also through the seeking he must neglect all that God requires of him, and forfeit all that God offers! Oh, how silly, how sinful, how awfully hazardous the course he is pursuing!

What, then? Shall he abandon it all in terror? Shall he hate the world and flee from it? Shall he become a hermit, refusing to receive good, and to do good in his generation? Shall he give up his earthly calling, foregoing the temporal advantages which are held out to him; not exercising the powers which are entrusted to him; supposing that the God who put him into this world, and qualified him to fill a place in it, and stimulated him by pressing necessities, or by indwelling desires to seek profit or pleasure, nevertheless meant him to have nothing to do with the world; that because presently he is to die, now he ought not to live; but to drag a sad, inactive, solitary, impatient existence. Surely not! His place now is in the world, his work is in the world; he refuses God service in not exercising his worldly calling; he gives up the means of probation, and the opportunities of development and improvement in the highest powers and best graces, and disqualifies himself for heaven, if he fulfils not his destiny on earth. Let him abide in his calling; let him discharge its obligations; let him pursue its advan-

tages, and cull its pleasures, and perform all its bidding; but throughout all, let him remember, and act upon the remembrance that he is not a mere worldling; and to keep him from being absorbed in the world, or grovelling in its pursuits, to quicken him in concern for higher responsibilities and privileges, to impress upon him that all that is of the world is temporary and fleeting, that the world is passing away from him, and he from it, let him reflect frequently and seriously, "What is my life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away;" and so let him temper the lower life (and raise himself above it), by piously resolving that its present occupations, its plans and hopes shall all be subject to the condition, "If the LORD will I should live, and do this or that."

That we all want to be influenced by such thoughts is too evident to need proof. The very best of us are wont practically to regard this earth as our abiding home, or the only stage upon which we shall ever act a part, and earthly pursuits and pleasures as the only aims and rewards of our being. We may write "D. V.," or say, "If the LORD will," after every engagement, every proposed scheme. We may make our wills

and set our houses in order, and purchase a burial place, and carry about a shroud, and yet forget that we have to die. Grey hairs, or enfeebled frames, and the perceptible growth within us of the seeds of mortal disease, and sick beds, and sudden deaths around us, may cause us momentary misgivings, may make us perhaps permanently a little uneasy: but still we live on, as though there were no end of life; we put off preparation for death, and for another state after death, as though we could not die till we chose to do so. Not for want of knowledge, of constant testimonies and reminders of the contrary are we thus confident (for we all know that our life is but a vapour which the heat may presently dispel, or the wind of the next moment cause to vanish), but because we do not feel ourselves to be so entirely in the hands of an Omnipotent and mysteriously exercised Providence, as to need to be constantly depending upon it, and asking of it, "If the LORD will;" and so presenting to ourselves, in all its force, the consideration that perhaps "The LORD may *not* will." I speak to men, and women, and children, full of present occupations and future plans. I bid you consider your occupations and review your plans. Do you imagine that the first may be at any moment in-

terrupted, and the last never begun to be carried out? Some of you are almost exclusively pleasure seekers; others, careless creatures of the present; others intent upon business, or profit, upon obtaining power, or knowledge, or fame; either reaping a worldly harvest now, or sowing for a future worldly harvest. Others are divided in care and desire between this life and the next. Others are in theory, and in much practice, living above this world, using it but not abusing it, in it but not of it. Put the question to yourselves, all and each of you. Do you feel your life to be such a vapour, that it is in momentary risk of vanishing away; that only if the LORD will, will it appear a little time; that possibly He may not will? You would say, "yes," doubtless, if you were forced to answer aloud, as you sit in church, interrogated by the messenger of CHRIST out of the Bible, just as to a question out of the Church Catechism, you would give an answer out of the Church Catechism. But do you *feel* "yes"? Is it your sure and strong conviction? Do your lives say "yes"? I shall not be unjust to you, if I say that I stand in doubt of many of you; that, alas! I have no doubt of some; that your hearts do not thus respond; that your lives give a manifest contradiction.

Brethren, I am not here to accuse, but to admonish and help. Let me suggest, then, why you fail to realise such a palpable truth. It is, first, because you have an idea that the Advent is far off; and, secondly, because, as I have reminded you in so many ways lately, you shut GOD too much out of this present world. The first disciples, as you may see from St. Paul's and St. Peter's Epistles, were filled with the conviction that the Advent was very near, that the next moment might reveal it. This did not take them out of the world, for they believed that CHRIST would come to them in the world. Neither did it make them forsake their earthly calling, for they knew that it was in that calling that they were to serve GOD, and to prepare for His coming. But it caused them always to have regard to the end, and it sanctified every pursuit and plan with the thought, "The LORD may come," and so constantly suggested the proviso, "If the LORD will." We have no such conviction of CHRIST'S nearness, and therefore have little reference to it, and are faintly impressed with it. We argue, the Judgment has tarried so many years, it may therefore tarry many more. Death has so long spared us, he will not come to us yet. We shall have time to finish our present

occupations, we can enter upon and execute many fresh plans. We need not raise a doubt, "If the LORD will."

But, secondly, we shut GOD out of this present world. We forget that He is ever with us; that He is constantly exercising His providence over us; that He is not ignorant, or indifferent, much less distant, when we propose and proceed to execute; that it is by His exercised permission, by His actual letting us go in anger, that we fall into sin; by His inclining, and helping, and carrying us, that we think, and attempt, and perform what is good; that thus watching and caring for us, and surrounding us, He is at once the Witness, the Judge, the Rewarder of our every thought and way; that consequently, when He has tried us enough, or when we have long wearied Him, He is at hand to decide about us, and, deciding, to execute the decision. His forbearance and interference, the length of the probation, the numbers and kinds of trial, are different in different cases. He knows what is right and sufficient for each, and He applies it, and then He says, "It is enough. Thy righteousness is as length of days. Well done, good and faithful servant;" or, "It is of no use that thou shouldst be stricken any more. Thou wilt revolt more and more. The

whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. Depart from me!" And in either case the vapour is dispelled—it vanisheth away.

O for the full perception and realisation of this truth; that we are in the hands of a watching, proving, waiting, judging, visiting GOD. It would be hard then to do or propose anything, without immediately adding, "If the LORD will."

Two concluding thoughts suggest themselves.

First, that life is of such different duration in different cases, because we have individual capabilities and responsibilities, and some by many trials and length of days are proved, others quickly and easily made perfect, or wholly hardened; and because a discerning, ruling GOD is ever at hand to close the trial at the fit moment.

Secondly, that we are individually kept uncertain of the duration of our life, to counteract the sad proneness which belongs to us, of putting off eternal interests, and following our own ways to the uttermost; to give to every moment, and every act of life, such vital importance, that we may fear to squander or pervert it; to keep us ever mindful of our latter end, and always intent upon doing the LORD'S work, and preparing ourselves for heaven; that the GOD at hand may never be slighted, and the world be always so loosely held,

that we may easily and readily let go of it whenever the LORD will.

"Go to now, ye that say, To-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the LORD will, we shall live, and do this, or that."

SERMON IV.

THE UNKNOWN GOD.

ACTS, XVII., 22, 23.

Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. *Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you.*

THE city of Athens was wholly given to idolatry. It was crowded with altars, dedicated to the supposed superior deities, to deified men, to abstract virtues, Love, Truth, Mercy, and the like. Whatever new god was described and recommended to them was immediately recognised, and thenceforth worshipped; and, besides, the Athenians' love of something new, led them to search out for and invent gods for themselves. Hence it came to pass, that there were more idols in that one city than in all the rest of Greece: so that Satirist did not much exaggerate when he said that in Athens you might more

easily find a god than a man. It belongs not to our present purpose to consider how this arose; to contemplate the strange coexistence of so much superstition and so much cultivation of intellect, or to strive to enter into the feelings which animated Paul, when his spirit was stirred within him at the sight of the city wholly given to idolatry. We pass on to the time when the Apostle stood on Mars's hill, in sight of many heathen altars, surrounded by Epicureans and Stoics and disciples of many other schools of philosophy, some striving to silence him, others intent upon hearing something new from him—to meet the contentious gainsayings of the one, to enlist the curiosity of the other; to make use of their various dispositions, of all that he saw and heard, in promoting the glory of God, and, if it might be, in leading them to salvation.

It must be borne in mind that some of these news-seeking Athenians inconsistently enough contended with him, because he taught what was novel; while others, on that very account, were favourable to him, hoping that he would set forth some strange gods—some additional objects of worship to whom they might erect altars. "Ye men of Athens," he said, "I perceive from actual observation that you, more than other people,

have great regard for religion." This is the right meaning of the words translated: "In all things ye are too superstitious." It is not likely that the Apostle would have commenced a speech intended to conciliate and enlighten them, with words that would at once affront them, and make them deaf to all else he had to say. Besides, it is clear from what follows, that he is not directly calling upon them to abandon what was false, but to understand and accept rightly a truth which they held in ignorance. "I say nothing to you now upon the many gods whom you worship *by name*, but, pointing to an altar inscribed to the Unknown GOD (it was probably in sight) I answer those who contend with me for speaking about the unknown, and gratify those who want to hear something new, by taking that altar as my text, and preaching to you about 'the Unknown GOD'—about no new god, for He is already the object of your worship; but still about one of whom much that is new to you may be said. Give ear to me, ye that are so full of reverence for the gods, while I describe to you an object indeed of your present reverence, but one of whose nature and operations and demands upon you, you know nothing."

Respecting the existence of such an altar, we

are told that the Athenians through the very excess of their idolatry (which led them to look for gods in every place and circumstance, and to ascribe every event, good or ill, to the influence of some deity) had on more than one occasion, when an unusually severe pestilence had visited them, which they could not connect with any of their known gods, conjectured that it must be the doing of some god whom they did not propitiate with sacrifices, and, failing to find out who it was, and yet fearing to neglect his worship, had caused altars *without names* to be erected, and offerings to be made to the nameless being; and that in course of time these altars came to be described, and to bear a corresponding inscription, as severally the altars of an "unknown god." There is no reason to suppose that they meant to exalt that god above the others, that they had any clearly defined ideas of the general operations of one unknown Being, much less that they meant under that title to worship the God of the Jews; but with a kind of natural instinct, a very vague feeling that something beyond and above what they knew, existed, they had stumbled, as it were in the dark, upon a real truth, which was now to be revealed to them. "Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship—Whom you are right in worship-

ping, but of Whose proper worship you know nothing, Him declare I, and reveal unto you." You know how St. Paul went on, meeting without mentioning the errors of the various sects of philosophers, that there was indeed a GOD who made the world, and all things therein; that He was not a mere idol of wood and stone ("dwelling not in temples made with hands"), that He had no such passions, and no such needs as they ascribed to Jove and Mars and their deified men ("Neither is worshipped with men's hands as though He needed anything"), that He was not a sentiment—an ideal thing—a being bound by fate—an indifferent spectator of men's ways. "He giveth to all life and breath and all things." "In Him we live and move and have our being." "He hath appointed a day in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom He hath chosen;" to whom He has borne such signal testimony in raising Him from the dead; in whose name, and at whose command, I come to tell you of the resurrection from the dead, and to call you out of the ignorance which GOD will no longer wink at, and to urge upon you repentance and preparation for judgment. So he spoke of the unknown GOD. Some mocked, and refused to understand; some were in doubt

and difficulty, and wished to hear more; others began to know Him who had hitherto been unknown, and clave unto the Apostle, and believed. And shortly after Paul departed from Athens, never, as far as we know, to visit again!

It would be interesting to consider the strange rise and spread of ignorance which in course of time made the GOD, Who had been seen and heard and walked with in Eden, and had never left Himself without witness, wholly unknown to the creatures of His hand, and the objects of His providential care; to contemplate the idolatry of ignorant heathen man, not seeing GOD in all His works, not able to find Him even when looking for Him and desiring to worship Him, believing in every god but the true One, sometimes even offering sacrifices to devils; to discuss, too, how it is the world by wisdom knows not, and never has known GOD, that intellect cannot search Him out, that intellect has even blinded many to whom the unknown GOD was plainly exhibited; to ask how much of this is natural, how much unnatural, how much judicial—the punishment of pride, the reward of loving darkness rather light, because of evil deeds. But interesting as would be the consideration of "GOD unknown in the world," there is a more important theme sug-

gested by the text for us to dwell on, namely, "GOD unknown in the Church." "There standeth one among you Whom ye know not." Let me speak to you on this, brethren.

Whatever may be the state and disposition of the people whom the clergyman has to deal with in his various daily ministrations and his intercourse with the world, once a week, at least, he addresses an assembly in some sense given to religion. As he stands in the pulpit on the Lord's Day he may adopt almost the words of St. Paul on the Areopagus: "I perceive that you (and such as you) are more than the rest of mankind GOD-fearing, taking an interest in religion, listening to its teaching, partaking of its ordinances, supplicating, praising, serving GOD."

It may, indeed, occasionally be that some present themselves to see if there is anything in the church for them to object to, or ridicule; that others have come in conformity to the fashion, to hear something new, to see and be seen; to make a show of respectability, to wile away an idle time; and that many others, though proposing to themselves the observance of a religious duty, are so formal, so listless, so unreal, that it cannot be said of them that they are "given to religion." Nevertheless, I repeat that the clergyman, as he

stands in the pulpit, has before him the best, *i. e.*, the most religious of mankind; not mockers, and revilers, and persecutors; not gainsayers, and despisers, and forgetters; but real worshippers—more or less reverential and earnest, more or less enlightened—of the true GOD. But has he not in these same persons (as St. Paul had in the Athenians) many worhippers of an unknown GOD? May he not venture to say to almost all, "Whom ye ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you." Christian worshippers, my brethren, often have many idols, who share almost equally with GOD their interest and affections and service. They have, many of them, their "ism," their Paul, their Cephas, or Apollos, their favourite dogma, their preferences and prejudices for some particular rites, and ceremonies, and modes of worship. In church, and out of church, their religion consists largely in giving heed to these things: GOD is in their thoughts, but not in all their thoughts, or not the chief, the engrossing object of their thoughts; He is one of many objects. You find this out if you listen to their remarks after service. "Such a chant went well or badly; the preacher's manner was pleasing, or the contrary; his language very ornate, or very bald; the theme one they like, or one they do not like;

the rubric strictly observed, or strangely disregarded;" and so on. Of course, as all these things are means to an end, and as the end is gained, or not gained, by their suitableness, or the opposite, it is lawful and right to give them some consideration: but I put it to you, brethren, whether they are not too often regarded as themselves the end; as though, provided they were satisfactory, there was nothing more wanting; as though they were rightly as much the objects of interest as the GOD in Whose service they are used, or, rather, as though regarding them were regarding GOD!

O brethren, we are too attentive to the system —too regardless of the Centre! We want to know—(to feel, I mean, for the Christian's knowledge is of the heart)—that GOD is above all—that where other objects have anything like an equal share of attention, where they hide Him from us in His pure essence and direct influence, there He is ignorantly worshipped—that He is a Spirit, not a chant, a voice, a figure of speech, a rubric, a turning east or west. Through these we may reach Him; many of them are steps and accessories to worship; but if in these we rest, then we set them up as idols, side by side with Him, and prove that to us He is but as the unknown *god of the* Athenians.

See, dear brethren, I beseech you, if aught of this old error clings to you, and pray GOD to clear you from it, and resolve henceforth to strive to keep clear. Treat means as means—value them; be glad that they are becomingly afforded you, and rejoice if they help you; but do not let the best of them beguile you, nor the worst of them hinder you, from finding and worshipping GOD Himself; from going away filled with thoughts of Him. "I prayed to GOD; I praised Him; I held communion with Him; I heard the things of GOD from His messenger, and have now to go and live by what I have done, and received, and heard." These are the thoughts to take away from church with you, and to prove to you that you wisely worship the known GOD.

I have dwelt much on this part of the subject, because of the general forgetfulness of it; a forgetfulness which prevents many from rendering acceptable service to GOD, and from obtaining the full help and comfort which religion affords to all who rightly use it.

But there are many other kinds of ignorant worship. It is possible to cast down all idols, and worship GOD alone, and yet err. The so-called spiritualist does this: the man who supposes that addressing himself directly to GOD, is

sufficient, without the use of appointed forms and ordinances; who attaches no importance to baptism and holy communion; who thinks that no grace accompanies their use, or that he can have the grace without the sign; who says that praying at home is a good substitute for congregational worship; who boasts that he can read a sermon for himself, and a better one than he can hear in church; or that the Bible is sufficiently clear to him without an interpreter.

Such an one ignorantly worships an unknown God. He dictates, instead of obeying; he chooses, instead of submitting to what is appointed for him; he puts reason in the place of faith; he refuses to walk in God's way of salvation; he disputes the Divine wisdom in requiring him to be baptised, and to partake of the Cup and Bread of Blessing; in warning not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together; in asking, "How shall they hear without a preacher?" in appointing a standing ministry; he rebels against God, when he disregards these ordinances; he makes God a liar when he presumes to deem them unnecessary. Oh, he has great need that the God whom he ignorantly worships, should be plainly declared unto him!

Again, that man ignorantly worships God, who

substitutes the forms for the life of religion; who supposes that a sanctuary service atones for all want of service elsewhere; who prays in church, but not in his closet; who hears the Bible read or expounded, but does not search it diligently for himself; who receives sacraments, but does not foster, and use, and develop the sacramental grace, which is entrusted to him as an awful talent to be increased and accounted for; who balances the religion of Sunday against the worldliness of the whole week; who every seventh day eases his conscience of its sin, by sighing out the general confession, and forthwith takes to himself the comfort of the declaration of forgiveness, and then goes back to his old transgressions and omissions, till the holy day comes round again. Of course whoever does this, or any part of it deliberately, is grossly, culpably ignorant of the GOD whom he professes to worship; but it is not of such that I speak now. I have in mind professing Christians, persons who busy themselves about religion, who are regular in their attendance on means of grace, who never wilfully desecrate the LORD'S day, who knowing that unpardoned sin separates from GOD, and that without grace, life is unblessed, are anxious for pardon and grace, and frequently seek them in GOD'S appointed ways; but yet, forget,

are not impressed with the danger of a relapse, and the sin of non-improvement, and so somehow or other, fall into a routine of formal religion on Sunday, which is not in their thoughts, except as a matter that belongs to next Sunday all through the week. This is to worship ignorantly an unknown GOD—a GOD Who does not accept intermittent worship, Who bestows pardon only on repentance and amendment of life, Who gives grace for use, Whose sacraments are meals to sustain life and strengthen for service, Whose Sabbath is a holy rest to refresh for holy work, in Whom we live, and move, and have our being, Whose glory is to be our constant aim, His presence our perpetual joy. But these, and many other ignorances—such as the disregard of particular attributes, the picturing for oneself what GOD ought to be like, and so varying the picture according to the fancy of him who draws it, instead of searching how, and what manner of GOD He has declared Himself to be, and what worship is appointed, and therefore acceptable—these, I say, are the faults of individuals, or of certain classes only. Let me now speak of an ignorance, a respect in which GOD is more or less unknown, which concerns us all. And here, dear brethren, my object is not to censure, to blame you for

what you have not, but pointing out to you the GOD whom Scripture reveals, to help you to correct what is amiss, to fill up what is wanting in your conceptions of GOD, and so to attain to the blessedness of knowing Him fully, and to discharge the duty of worshipping Him in spirit and in truth.

Observe St. Paul, while acknowledging the religious reverence of the Athenians, evidently deals with them as men who understood not the truths, the objects, the blessings of religion; as those who when they had built their altars, and celebrated their holy days, and offered their sacrifices, thought they had fulfilled all that religion required of them, and who expected to get nothing by their religion, but exemption from certain grievous pestilences, or help perhaps in war—mere occasional miraculous manifestations of dreadful power—who had no conceptions of sanctifying influence, of moral responsibility, of rewards of righteousness. To them he declares GOD to be, One not far from them, One whom they might find, in Whom they then lived and moved, and had their being, Who henceforth would not wink at any ignorance, Who was at present treating them, and regarding them with a view to a coming judgment. Now we are better (thank GOD, who

maketh us to differ!) than these Athenians; but still we want somewhat of the heart-knowledge which Paul would have impressed on them. We want to be more fully convinced that religion is not a pastime, but a business; that not only duty, but interest, momentous interest, is involved in it, especially that it is not a mere concern and preparation and provision for the future, but a present substantial reality; that GOD is not the object of distant worship; that His wrath and His mercy are, not rarely, but constantly, being exercised here; that He is not a departed LORD, Who has set us to do His work against His return, and will take no account of us till some far off day; that He has not left us unrewarded, unpunished, unhelped in the present, not caring what we are, what we do, what we suffer, so as when He comes back, we have either done what He appointed, or have assumed the position of penitents for offence, and supplicants of compassion.

Is it not matter of experience that we are not sufficiently influenced by the hopes and fears of religion, that we do not adequately reverence GOD, or seek Him, and rest on Him, because we suppose that He is afar off, and that all that we have to expect from Him, will only begin to be realised in the next world? GOD, as a present

GOD, is too much unknown to us. We do not feel that He is now about us; that His eye is watching us, and His arm upraised over each of us at every moment of our lives; that He is a guest actually in us, to be honoured and waited on now. We do not know of His present closeness, of His immediate rewards and punishments, His pleasure or displeasure, His instant succour, or instant withdrawal from us, according to what He sees in us. We do all, and bear all in distant expectation, and therefore we do negligently, and bear feebly and impatiently. Could we realise the perpetual working, the instant retribution, the very touching of GOD now, it would be easy to regard and serve Him, it would be all but impossible to neglect Him. No man could prefer dross to gold, misery to bliss, death to life, if they were both offered him at the same moment. No one could hesitate whom to obey, whom to trust, whom to fear, whom to love, if GOD were seen on the one side, and fellow man on the other. It is because GOD, and the things of GOD, are supposed to be far off, that we first prefer the other, and then practically regard it as that which alone has real existence.

Well, then, this is what we have to mend. I have been urging the mending on these Sundays

in Advent, in striving to show you that there is a GOD present to superintend, and provide, and care for you in this life, and in every event and moment of this life; that there is an actual and immediate judgment of every deed, good and evil, and that there is a present business of religion, and a direct service of GOD to be now attended to. It is not head-knowledge that you want, but heart-perception, and realisation. You want to feel what you must know (because the Bible has told you that GOD is a GOD at hand, and not a GOD afar off); that godliness has the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come; that the irreligious is condemned already. No expectation, no delay, no vision. All fulfilled, immediate, and substantially real. You fancy, perhaps, that it cannot be so. You urge that it is contrary to your experience; you have served GOD, and not been rewarded; you have trusted in Him, and not been supported; you have sinned against Him, and not been punished. Brethren, believe me, you have not. "Experience" means that which has been ascertained by trial. Make trial, and all will be proved. Devote yourselves now to GOD, follow Him, give up for Him to-day, and you shall be rewarded to-day. Sin against Him to-day, and you shall be punished to-day.

Invoke His aid to-day, and you shall surely have it. Do not prescribe your own mode of visitation. Be sure that He will use His, and watch for it, and seek to know it, and then you will have an experience to quote. I only repeat to you what He has said. When you know Him, you will find that He is true. Then wait on Him, acquaint yourselves with Him, serve Him in the present, and look for Him in the present, and you will find Him in the present.

SERMON V.

FAITH AND ITS BLESSEDNESS.

St. John, xx., 29.

Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.

DOES our Lord mean to say that there was no blessedness in the sight which he then presented?—that it was not a precious privilege actually to see Him, to hear Him, to be perceptibly with Him? Would He, too, withdraw and reverse the blessing He had formerly pronounced—"Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see"? Would He tell us that the kings and prophets, who saw the promises only afar off, who fancied and conjectured, and died in hope, were more blessed than the hearers of the Sermon of the Mount, the spectators of the Transfiguration, the companions of that three years' ministry, the guests at Emmaus, the disciple that reclined on His bosom? No, surely!

The blessedness of the Apostles, in certainly seeing, and being with CHRIST in the flesh, is, in its peace and joy, a blessedness which stands pre-eminent and alone, and must do till again He is seen in Heaven. But peace and joy are not the greatest blessings. That which calms, that which gladdens, is nothing in comparison with that which sanctifies and elevates; and there is a blessedness which does this; and which, therefore, is greater. It is the blessedness which faith produces. "Blessed (*i.e.*, more blessed) are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." Belief, faith—what is it? It may be described as the assent of the understanding, to that which is not proved to any of our senses, but which appears credible because of the testimony given to it. We all have this faith, in human affairs. We all of us accept as true—are convinced of their truth, and act upon the conviction—things which are not proved to us, but are supported by reliable statement. If you serve for wages, or sell goods on credit, or become surety for another, or go out to seek a new home in a distant land, you do it in faith. You cannot see into the heart, and be sure of the honesty of your employer, your customer, your friend; but what appears, from what you are told by others of him, you rely on him. And so

again, you do not actually know that there is such a land as you propose to seek, but you believe it, because of all that travellers have said of it, of the goods you have seen, the letters you have read, which are stated to have come from it. Of course, as the testimony varies in its credibility, this faith is of different degrees. You have such faith in your well-tried friend, in his integrity and his wisdom, that you know, you say, that he will not deceive you, and that he cannot be deceived himself. Others, of whom you know less, you believe more slowly. Some, you think, are not qualified to give testimony; they have the thing second-hand, or they were not competent to judge of what they saw, and heard, and felt; or they are not truthful, and may wilfully misrepresent: and even, in the best cases, faith is sometimes misplaced. Therefore, your faith in human things, has always, perhaps (and should have) a trace of doubt in it—sometimes is weak, sometimes fails altogether. It would be wrong and injurious to have equal faith in all; but, on the other hand, to be always doubting, to refuse to believe without seeing, would be misery, and folly, and mockery of self. Divine faith is different: the accepting (that is) of what is recommended to us by the testimony of God, by

well-proved miracles, by prophecies since fulfilled, by any other of GOD'S witnesses. This is perfect. It admits of no doubts and qualifications. It is as sure of what it believes, as if it handled, and heard, and saw it: yea, surer, for its own judgment might be deceived; but GOD knows all things and judges rightly, and GOD cannot deceive. Therefore, when GOD reveals, we may not question the plausibility of what is shown; we have no room for doubt as to His opportunities of knowing, His truthfulness in communicating what is narrated. All we may do, is to ask—Has GOD spoken, are these things His testimony? And this we ought to do; for there is no blessing pronounced by the text on the credulous, who take everything as from GOD, without examination. Thomas surely would have erred, if, simply because some one told him of CHRIST'S resurrection, he had straightway believed it. We are exhorted not to believe every spirit, but to try the spirits whether they be of GOD. We have to examine miracles, to see whether they are real or pretended, and prophecies, to see that they were not written after the professed fulfilments, and all revelations, lest they should be spurious. Failing to do this, we might have followed Theudas, who came to nought, or Joan of Arc: we might become Mohamme-

dans or Mormonites. We have to guard against this; not to be credulous; to be sure that it is God that speaks: but then, being sure, whatever He describes, however incomprehensible or improbable, whatever He commands, no matter how apparently unreasonable, whatever He promises, against experience, against opinion, against hope, to accept all, and rely on all, and lead the life of reliance. Yes, brethren, this is the believing which alone is blessed; the believing which leads to doing. Faith is the evidence by which we see things naturally unseen; it is the substance, the very handled reality, of things naturally only hoped for; and which, by its revelations of beauty and bliss, by its sanctions and persuasions, and by all that it shows us of the present, and promises or threatens in the future, makes us fly to God, and cling to Him, and depend on Him, and live for Him, and look for Him. Less than this—mere assent of the understanding, without heart-embracing, and life-demonstrating, and exercising—is not the belief that is blessed. Faith without works is dead, being alone. If then, brethren, you would be partakers of the blessedness promised in the text, you must have fully received, and be acting upon the form of religion which God has given you. You must have implicit

trust in Him for help and support and peace and blessing. You must know that whatever He has described is real, whatever He has promised or threatened will surely be fulfilled, on the conditions He has laid down; and you must testify and act upon your knowledge by a corresponding life. I do not say that all this is demanded of you in perfection; that the hope of blessing is gone, if you fail of aught of it: but I do say that, if in anything you distrust GOD, if you question or demand further proof of, or are indifferent to anything He has revealed, and deliberately do not live by it, then you cannot claim the benediction of the text.

But it occurs to you to ask, perhaps, how it is that GOD selects believing, rather than seeing, on any other way of reception for special blessing.

Now, it is not necessary that GOD should account to us for what He does or wills. Creatures of His hand, we are made for Him; dependents on His bounty, we must thankfully receive it in any way and form of bestowal. But still there are reasons which may be briefly suggested for the selection of faith.

First, then, faith embodies the entire trustful devotion to GOD, which, above any assent to what is proved, any following of what is seen or

heard, magnifies the honour of GOD, and so sets forth His glory. It owns His truth, His providence, His love, and prompts to a free-will, spiritual, glorifying service of Him. Secondly, unless there are to be perpetual miracles, faith alone can be permanently and universally influential. If we are to be guided by sight, or hearing, or touching, then the revelations to one generation would have to be repeated to each following generation, and those of one country performed again in every other. Thus CHRIST would have had to continue on earth, to have visited every land, and been crucified and raised from the dead in every land, or to have gathered all nations into Judea to witness what was done; and this would have had to be repeated over and over again to our fathers, to us, to our children, or else some would have been without the necessary influence to serve, and love, and depend on Him. And more than this, since the sights we see and the sounds we hear, are soon over, and leave but a faint remembrance behind, we should be imperfectly influenced by them, when CHRIST ceased to speak; or when He passed into another place we should be without our object of worship, our instructor or hope. And even if these objections can be met, still the perpetuity of CHRIST'S

visible presence, the beholding of His miracles, and hearing of His words, would necessarily put a stop to all worldly occupations; would make probation little more than a name; would constrain men by natural influences to a carnal or slavish adherence to Him, or would drive them into reckless rebellion, and instant and irrevocable condemnation.

But again, faith is more blessed because it has greater privileges—because it reveals more clearly, brings nearer, than any sense could do. If you only hear a loved one, do you not desire to see him? If you see him, are you not unblessed unless you embrace him? And then, is there not an influence, a way of communicating, that surpasses this—a purer, a more spiritual influence, one which brings you together, and keeps you together, and makes you one—love, which surpasses, which is independent of, or only uses as accessaries, the bodily senses? We are too apt, brethren, to talk of seeing as believing; to count sense above feeling; to exalt what belongs to the body, above what belongs to the mind or spirit. Doubtless, the error arises from the way in which we speak of faith giving way to sight in heaven, as though the eyes of the body only, and not the mind and spirit, were to behold CHRIST then; as though

mental and spiritual perception were not better than bodily; as though there were no assurance that faith is an abiding gift, and that, therefore, while in heaven there will be much to gratify the eye of the body, there will still be much more which faith alone can realise. My brethren, the greatest eternal blessedness will be vouchsafed to faith, and the greatest blessedness of this state belongs to faith, because it is the exercise of man's noblest and best, and most reliable faculties, far superior in excellence, far more certain in ascertaining the truth, than ears, or eyes, or hands.

Once more, faith is blessed above seeing, because it grasps a set of truths, and enjoys a class of pleasures which are different from those of the senses, and which the senses cannot touch. God the Father invisible for ever, God the Holy Ghost, blowing like the wind where it listeth, so that you cannot see whence it cometh and whither it goes, ministering angels, spiritual influences, and consolations, and helps—what can ear, or eye, or hand know of these? But faith knows them, hears them, sees them, handles them, and joys in them. And this, brethren, exhibits the nature of faith's blessedness; that to it is revealed the whole spiritual world; that the evidence which it

needs, the object of its worship, its Saviour, its LORD, its hopes and fears, and encouragements and promises are never absent, and never missed, (but by its own dimness or voluntary blindness) whatever may become of the outward signs and boding presences. Picture to yourselves, brethren, the scene of that chamber where the raised CHRIST stood manifest, in the posture of blessing, before His adoring disciples. Imagine what Thomas had before felt, and what he now felt. Then hear CHRIST say—The bliss of this moment might have been yours before, if you had sought to attain it by faith, and not by sight; and what you now see may be yours for ever, for in spirit I shall ever be with you, and by faith you may ever behold Me! Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed"; and that blessing, brethren, was for us, if we will have it. If we believe, then we are thus blessed. If we are not blessed, we may be. O let us lay hold on this truth, let us cultivate faith, let us pray to GOD for an increase of it, and let us perpetually exercise it in beholding Him Who is ever with us, to pardon our faithless sins, to restore us to His company, to breathe upon us peace and blessing.

SERMON VI.

FAULTLESSNESS BEFORE GOD.

(INNOCENTS' DAY.)

REVELATION, XIV., 5.

They are without fault before the throne of GOD.

JOB declares that GOD puts no trust in His saints; that He charges His angels with folly; that in His sight the very heavens are not clean. This language is, of course, figurative, and not to be taken literally; but it well describes to us the transcendent holiness of GOD, and His utter abhorrence of all evil. In comparison of Him, heaven itself is not pure, and angels, endued with wisdom, swift and constant to obey, delighting in His will, even these are not perfect—fall far short of perfection before Him. Job would show us the distance between GOD and man. St. John, however, in the chapter of my text, would exhibit another truth, not contradictory, but rather supplementary to Job's, namely, the nearness, through grace, of man to GOD. The Apostle

is describing, for the comfort and encouragement of the tried and persecuted, a vision which he had seen of some of those who have passed away from this world, and, as a kind of first-fruits, are already with GOD and the Lamb; and he says, that "in their mouth is found no guile; for they are without fault before the throne of GOD."

"Without fault," means here, without spot or blemish; not only free from actual transgression, but wholly untainted by corruption of sin—not wanting in anything that belongs to the perfect character of the approved of GOD.

That man in his natural state is altogether faulty, that even in his redeemed, and spiritualised, and sanctified state, while here on earth, he has still many faults, are truths so plainly taught, so proved to our reason and experience, that it would be idle to enforce them. How, then, can he ever stand faultless before the throne of GOD? Now some would answer, that for CHRIST'S sake GOD overlooks, that CHRIST, by His merits, hides man's faults; and so that the redeemed in heaven are not really faultless, but that for CHRIST'S sake faultlessness is reckoned, imputed to them. This is what may be called the popular answer to our question. But, brethren, how utterly wrong it is seen to be, when we consider

that, in order to exalt GOD'S mercy and His wisdom in contriving justification, it sacrifices His truth and His holiness. GOD cannot call the faulty faultless. He Who is Truth cannot enter with His Holy Son (Who is also Truth) into a plan of deceit, by which, to Himself, to them, to angels, to the whole universe, sin shall be presented as holiness. GOD may agree not to reckon with men for their sins, to forget the past, on certain conditions to deal with the faulty as if they were actually faultless; but He cannot—I say it advisedly, it is beyond the limits of His power, as regulated by His truth—He cannot call evil good. And, brethren, besides, even if it were possible that by some strange agreement with the Son, sinful man should be passed off as holy, still his sin, while it remained, hide it, disguise it, call it by what name you will, must separate from GOD. Charity might forbear to punish it, or to make mention of it. Charity might even gild it over; but Holiness deals not with the name, but with the reality; and holiness must shrink from sin and thrust it away. This ought to be the most readily perceived and admitted of all Scripture truths, that GOD cannot tolerate near iniquity; that—if I may venture reverently to use such words—even if GOD were

willing to receive to Himself an unchanged sinner, the actual reception would be morally impossible; the same heaven could not contain holiness and sin! No, brethren, if the sinner is to enter heaven, it must be, not because his name is changed, but his nature; he must be actually without fault before GOD. We see this to have been the case with those described in the text: for it is expressly said, "In their mouth was found no guile." Observe, it is not, GOD mercifully overlooked their guile for the sake of His dear Son, the Guileless One; He charitably called them guileless; but "in their mouth was found (the testimony of truth to the searching of holiness) no guile: yea, for they are altogether blameless, without spot or blemish." It is an actual, not an imputed faultlessness that is thus described. Now, how is it to be attained by sinful men? And here comes in a second answer of popular theology. At or after death, CHRIST meets the departed, and by His resurrection-power quickens that which was dead, purifies that which was corrupt, spiritualises, sanctifies, and, as by a miracle, converts the sinner into a perfect saint. This is an answer only second in popularity to the one we have been considering. Those who urge it, believe that man is naturally depraved,

that, under grace, he retains much, almost all, his old nature, that he is very faulty in deed, in will and affections. They know that he must be faultless to gain accession to heaven and dwell with God and the Lamb, and this faultlessness they hope for and pray for; but there is no effort to acquire it; there is no concern for the absence, the continued absence of it; it is regarded as altogether a thing of the future; the free and perfect gift—perfect at once—to the released soul and the raised body. Men who hold this view, are often better than their creed requires them to be. In love of God and devotion to Him, they strive to abandon sin and cultivate holiness; but they have no definite object in view of becoming faultless here, in order to be faultless in heaven. They seem to believe that they cannot get any nearer to faultlessness whatever they do, and that those who have made no efforts, ay, have even led ungodly lives, and, but for a few last sighs and ejaculations, would have died ungodly deaths, are just as qualified, just as fit in many cases, just as sure recipients of instantly converting and perfecting grace in the next world!

But if this is so, why have we such solemn warnings, to the effect that as the tree falls, so shall it lie? "He that is righteous, then, shall be

righteous still. He that is filthy then, shall be filthy still." Why is it that in the representations which we have of the Judgment, men are always dealt with according to what they were in life, "Inasmuch as ye did it," "Inasmuch as ye did it not"? Why is the pound taken away from him that did not seek to increase it, and given to him who had gained ten pounds, and the commentary subjoined, "Unto every one which hath shall be given, and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him"? Why is the boaster of his privileges—"In Thy name have I cast out devils"—instantly dismissed with the words, "Depart from me, I never knew you"? Why are they reproved who called CHRIST LORD, LORD, but did not the things which He said? What did St. Peter mean when he exhorted "Save yourselves;" and Paul, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;" "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall;" and CHRIST Himself, "Behold, I come quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every man according as his work shall be;" "Blessed are they that do His commandments that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city"?

Surely all this, as with a voice from heaven,

calls on us to put away the delusion, that mortal life is not a probation, that man has not a fitness to acquire in this life, in order that he may be faultless in heaven. The answer of truth, brethren, to the question, "How can man be faultless in heaven?" is, briefly, By praying, and striving, through the blessing of GOD, the grace of the Spirit of CHRIST, and his own self-denial, and diligence, and cultivated holiness, to become less and less faulty here. After all, he will never, on this side of the grave, be without spot or blemish, and perfect in holiness. Whatever CHRIST may do for him here, he will still have much to be purged away, much to be quickened, much to be glorified. But, be sure, there must be a seed-time here and a growing here, if there is to be a harvest hereafter. There must be a service, if there is to be a reward; we must be faithful in a little, before we are made rulers over much; there must be a fitness, a partial, a main fitness acquired here, or no admission there to the inheritance of the Saints in light. CHRIST'S work in us hereafter is not a transforming, but a completing, a finishing, a perfecting work. "To him that hath"—that is, that has made use of and improved what he hath—"to him more shall be given," and he shall abound. He who has traced

in his soul and life the outline of the features of the blessed JESUS, shall have the likeness filled up and finished by the Divine artist, and be wholly conformed to His image. He who has kept down the flesh, shall have the power of the flesh destroyed in him. He who has sought after holiness, shall be made perfect. A great change; much taken away, much added, but not a transformation. A great work, which can only be done then, and only by CHRIST; but which will fail to be done then if materials are not provided for it now; if the foundation has not been laid, and the walls have not been raised, and all made ready for the roof of GOD'S adding, and the capping of the tower of glory. Yes; this is the qualification, without which you cannot be received, but, having it, cannot be refused. Labour and pray to be faultless here, and CHRIST shall at the end perfect your faultlessness, and shall present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy. But the text seems to speak not of those who had washed away defilements, had secured pardon of offences, had repaired faults and made up deficiencies, in short, had been sinners, but, under the operation of the spirit of CHRIST, were become saints; but of those who never had been faulty, spotted, or blemished

"These are they which were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth." Of course, there must have been the spot and blemish of original sin; but, apart from this—which CHRIST'S applied purifying power and all-sufficient merits would entirely remove—there seems to have been in the lives of these persons no actual sin, no omission of righteousness. Now, as there is no man that liveth and sinneth not, it has been conjectured that the vision here exhibits those who were taken away to GOD in their infancy, before they had the power or the will to do good or evil, and who, therefore, as far as actual deeds and feelings are concerned, not by work, or grace, or conviction, but absolutely and from the first were faultless: and probably the selection of the description as the Gospel for this day, the festival of the Holy Innocents, has gone far to confirm this conjecture. But, brethren, this surely is not the meaning, at least the full meaning, of the words. They describe freedom from defilement and following of the Lamb as things that might have been otherwise. They hold up for the example and encouragement of those who were tempted to lust, and to depart from following the living LORD, the praise and

happiness of those who are without fault in these respects; and therefore they suggest to us, I think, as the most profitable and foremost thought, the blessedness, the superior blessedness of those who never have contracted sin, nor failed in holiness.

Men sometimes seem to fancy that the most glorious character in heaven, the object of GOD'S fondest love, will be the once deep-stained and wholly defiled, that have been washed in CHRIST'S blood till they are become whiter than snow, the reckless, and rebellious, and blaspheming, who have been subdued and converted; and that in comparison of these, the mainly regular righteous life will almost pass unnoticed. It is easy to account for the supposition. We read, without due consideration, of her that sinned much, and was forgiven much, and therefore loved much; of the returned prodigal rejoiced over more than the son who had remained at home; of the joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance; of publicans and harlots going into the kingdom of heaven before priests and scribes. We forget that these things were said to men who were not really righteous, but self-sufficient; that they were an accommodation to their own kind of reasoning; that they were the justifica-

tion of special works and feelings, and peculiar demonstrations. Surely we are not to understand by them anything more than that sinners were *at times* more in CHRIST'S thoughts than saints; that on the recovery of one lost sheep, the joy over that one caused the rest for the moment to be put out of remembrance. Surely we are not to understand that GOD has less love for, and shows less favour to those who have uniformly served and honoured Him, than to those whose life has been one of contempt and rebellion, who have refused to accept Him till they had made trial of all else; that GOD'S power and glory are more magnified in the ultimate conversion of such a sinner, than in the steady control and improvement of a life-long saint; that in themselves the reformed drunkards and defiled are better than those who were always sober and pure; that their memories are more blissful, and their themes of praise more satisfactory; that they are even equal in favour, in bliss, in manifested honour to those who were undefiled and consistently obedient, whom Holy Scripture distinguishes on this very account, of whom it relates, that they sing a song which no other can learn, signifying that they have a peculiar privilege and a peculiar joy! Brethren, be sure it is not so. GOD is abundantly

gracious to all who call upon Him, late as well as early. No one, whatever his past life, shall be refused who comes to Him through CHRIST. In his late righteousness all his former sins shall be forgiven and forgotten; they shall not once be mentioned unto him. He shall have too, the joy of the righteous, and shall dwell with GOD in heaven; but still He Who makes one star to differ from another in glory, Who bestows different measures of reward upon different capacities, and different attainments, has a special interest and a superior blessedness for those who have never been stained, who have always stayed in their father's house, and have obeyed His will and loved His voice. In themselves they are dearer to Him, as more like JESUS; and for them, He has seats closer to the throne of CHRIST, and offices of honour near His person.

If this is so, if "faultlessness," in the sense of never blotted, never imperfect, is the state that is most blessed, then, brethren, we might perhaps be tempted to envy the fate of those whom we commemorate to-day, who suffered so early for CHRIST'S sake, and as soon almost as they were born, were put to death. We might judge, too, that the little ones whom GOD so frequently takes away so soon after lending them, are summoned

to a higher blessedness than we can ever know; and therefore that not only would it have been gain to die in infancy, but that it is positive loss to live to years of discretion and responsibility. Let us not err herein. We believe that the dear innocents, whose first consciousness is of bliss in heaven, whose reason begins to develop, and their will to exercise itself, only when sin is impossible, are not only unspeakably blessed, but that GOD specially loves them, and folds them to His bosom (as we did here), because of that innocence: no guile, no defilement—all simplicity and trust. Thankful then in their sober moments are all bereaved parents who are assured of their departed little ones' eternal safety, and are spared the fears and anxieties, the heartrending realisation of self-will developed, and the world's evil example followed, and the devil triumphant. The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; and, in that He has taken away, from the evil to come, Oh! blessed be the name of the LORD.

But, brethren, it is only because we fear for the future, that we thankfully accept such a present. Could we be sure that our little ones would remain faultless, that they would not abuse the world, nor fall into great error or misery, that they would grow in grace, and in the

fear of the LORD, and at length surely attain to glory; then, not from selfishness, but for their sakes, we should covet length of days for them. And rightly, for there is a better faultlessness, and a correspondingly higher blessedness than that of infants, who were allowed no opportunity (and possessed no power) to contract fault: it is the faultlessness of those who shrink from the allowed opportunity, who restrain the possessed power, and overcome the persuading will, who pass through the fire without the smell of it being left on their garments, who make manifest by a life of self-denials, and resistances to temptations, and patience and perseverance in well-doing, their intelligent deliberate love of GOD, and hatred of evil. These are the tried, the eagerly accepted, the specially loved. These do the LORD'S work, and set forth the LORD'S glory. These shall indeed be welcomed with a "Well-done good and faithful servant," for them shall be reserved the best seats on the right hand of GOD; and they shall joy in GOD, and GOD in them, with a peculiar joy, for they are likest unto CHRIST, Whose spotlessness was preserved among so many defilements, Who with heart, and mind, and life, consistently, unceasingly served GOD, and Who therefore is highly exalted, and has a name which is *above all* other names.

Oh it is no mean privilege, brethren, which you forego, when you leave the ranks of the faultless, when you shrink from duty, or yield to sinful pleasure, or contract any stain of ungodliness. Say not, "It is only for once." It will surely be for more than once; but if it were not, still from being faultless that *once* makes you blotted and blemished. Say not, "I can repent by and by, and GOD of His mercy will accept me, and I shall be myself again." You may not live to repent. Sin may disincline, the Spirit provoked may leave you; but even if you do repent—though GOD will undoubtedly forgive, and in a sense restore you—remember, you can never be as you were before. You may be cleansed, but not as at first clean; admitted to heaven, but not to the band of the one hundred and forty-four thousand of undefiled; joined to the glorious choir of the redeemed, but not allowed, not able to sing the peculiar song of the faultless.

"But what," some would say, "is the use of this preaching? We are all already faulty; we can none of us have a place among these choice first fruits of GOD'S harvest." Brethren, faultlessness, pure faultlessness, is no longer ours; but comparative faultlessness (and Bible faultlessness, after all, is only comparative freedom from wilful

sin) may, and, I trust, does pertain to many of us; and for each degree of nearness to faultlessness, if I understand the Bible aright, there is its peculiar reward. I would put you on your guard against losing that reward, by sinking to a lower level. I would urge you to hold fast what you have, to subdue yourselves, to resist the world and the devil, to be ever on the watch against danger, and to flee speedily from temptation, if it is too strong to fight against, to seek strength and sanctification in means of grace, to pray constantly (and strive constantly to make good your prayer), that CHRIST would keep you from falling, and finally present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.

SERMON VII.

PAST MERCIES REVIEWED.

(NEW YEAR'S EVE.)

GENESIS, XXXII., 10.

I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast showed unto Thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands.

THESE are Jacob's words. They form part of the prayer which he offered to GOD, when, on his return from Haran, he found that Esau was coming out against him with four hundred men.

Mingled feelings must have possessed Jacob at this time; strange remembrances must have been his! Twenty years ago he had passed over that Jordan—near which he now stood—in flight from an enraged brother, meditating and preparing vengeance for an act of fraudulent injury. What a weary pilgrimage he had since followed; what

sorrows, what desolations had possessed his aching heart; how he had toiled and suffered wrong; even now was fleeing from it! Yet, those twenty years gone, he was coming back, not to the prospect of peace and happiness, not to the hope that his brother had forgotten his vengeance, or that he would easily be reconciled to him; but to face a mindful, aggravated avenger, strengthened by four hundred followers. Surely he had fled and been in exile to no purpose! Surely, by deferring it, he had increased his trouble! It must have been that Jacob now acutely remembered the cause of Esau's anger; that he meditated on the mean advantage that he had taken, the base fraud to which he had been a party, the lying, the profanity of his lips, the evil deeds which led to evil consequences. Ah! now he felt that man cannot sin with impunity, that transgression and punishment are bound together as cause and effect, that vengeance, though it tarry, though it slumber, though we run from it, and hide from it many, many days, will yet accomplish its purpose, will surely repay! Yes; and did he not feel that vengeance had even followed him; that he had been its victim all those twenty years; that the frauds of Laban, from first to last, and the strifes and dissensions of his own house-

hold were the fruits of his deceit; that GOD had allowed them, that in a way He had caused them in retaliation, in punishment of his sin! What an experience to him, what a proof to us, my brethren, that sin will surely find us out!

But Jacob must have had other and different thoughts—thoughts which preponderated. As he called to mind his first passage over Jordan, did not he remember the wonderful vision that was vouchsafed him of angels descending to earth, ascending to heaven, in token of Divine providence, of the intercourse between man and GOD? Did he not remember the Voice which promised to be with him, to keep him in all places whither he went, to bring him again to this land, to give it to him and to his seed after him? Did he not look along those twenty years, and remember that GOD had been with him, and that, by His command, he was now coming back; and did he not hope, yes, even against hope, that GOD would be with him in the coming struggle, that He would crown His mercy and goodness with a present success, and with the establishment of himself and his seed in the promised land? And one other remembrance surely he had. He remembered the vow which in the fresh reverence of GOD'S presence, in glad and grateful acceptance of His

promises, he had solemnly made, "The LORD shall be my GOD;" and he must have remembered how often he had forgotten that vow, how generally he had slightly regarded it. These I suppose to have been the feelings and remembrances which filled the breast of Jacob, when he uttered the prayer in which our text occurs. Observe how that prayer exhibits the right ordering of these feelings, making prominent, putting uppermost thoughts and acknowledgments of GOD'S goodness; and, in the moment of greatest peril, pausing to review mercies, and to give thanks! There is no bitter lamentation of his hard lot throughout those years of promised blessing; there is no pleading with GOD, that if he had sinned he had surely been punished enough; there is no mention of the merits of his contrite heart and amended life; there is no angry feeling against Esau, no supplication that GOD would smite and confound him. It is a godly, a model prayer. Betaking himself to GOD in the hour of danger, as his only confidence and help, he humbly urges no personal claim, but—that he is in the place of GOD'S commanding. "'Thou LORD that saidst unto me Return unto thy country and unto thy kindred,' I did not recklessly run into danger, I did not voluntarily

gratify the natural yearning of my poor heart. Thou broughtest me here, O LORD protect me here;" and then having put forth himself, though but such a little way, and coming to consider GOD, Who had shown him such wondrous goodness, Who had fulfilled for him so truthfully all His promises, he exclaims, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth which thou hast showed unto Thy servant: for with my staff—as a solitary, poor individual—I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands. Deliver me, I pray thee."

This seems to me, brethren, a fit theme for a sermon on New Year's Eve. Jacob, come back from Haran to Jordan, where he had made a covenant with GOD, may well typify our return to-night to the sanctuary of GOD, whence we went forth refreshed and pledged last New Year's Eve. Jacob's reflections—he is the pattern of a mediator—may well provoke us to ask of the days that are past, to remember all the way which the LORD our GOD has led us. Jacob's prayer shows us how to speak to GOD, what we should feel in His presence on such an occasion as this, how to propitiate Him, and to secure His defence and blessing in what lies before us.

I will not attempt, brethren, to picture the

circumstances through which you have passed in the year which is now all but ended; many of them I could only guess at, many of them, to me, would be unimaginable. Recall them for yourselves and meditate on them. They will teach you much, and influence you much. I will address you simply as those who have made a halt in the journey of life, and who want now GOD'S blessing in the known and unknown dangers, anxieties, sufferings, and labours that lie before you in the coming year.

Well: let your requests be made known unto GOD with prayer; above all—yes! I mean it —*above all*, with thanksgiving.

But, first, before you approach GOD, to speak to Him, to ask of Him, to thank Him, be sure that you can say to Him, "I am in the way of Thy commandments." If at this moment you are contentedly different from what you know He would have you to be; if you indulge, or do not resolutely renounce any besetting sin; if you deliberately neglect any positive duty; if in will and affections, and aims, you are worldly and selfish, and do not seek to be otherwise; if you are planning anything, or hoping for anything which GOD does not approve; if you are shrinking from, desiring to avoid, what He appoints; if

you have not made up your minds to try to be holy, to walk in the way of righteousness; then, brethren, you are disqualified to pray to GOD. He hears not such. He has made no promises to them: they are not His. Go fashion yourselves (He will mercifully give you grace to do it) into the character that He loves; get you into the paths that He has marked out; turn your face towards the Holy Land, and then come to tell Him of your felt unworthiness, to speak His praise, to intreat Him to be with you, to defend and prosper you; and be sure you shall be welcomed and blessed.

But, supposing you not disqualified to come, supposing you bent on coming, consider now your right posture and deportment before GOD. Ask nothing of right, ask all out of felt unworthiness, and that, not simply the unworthiness of the stranger, and alien, who want mercies which they have never known, and speak to a GOD that has not hitherto been their GOD, as the publican cried, "GOD be merciful to me a sinner;" but such an unworthiness as belonged to the prodigal, such as he felt and groaned under, when, reflecting on all the love and blessedness which he had experienced in his father's house, and had despised, and sinned against, and seeing the Father

coming towards him, ready to pardon, ready to embrace, ready to lead him home again, he was humbled to the very dust before Him, on account of his goodness, and declared himself unworthy to be called His son. Oh, my brethren, if you do not feel unworthy, when you approach the all-good and all-holy GOD, and if the feeling is not one enlightened by, and full of the remembrances of blessings already received, you are unfit to ask for further blessings. Not to have used GOD'S blessings is great indignity; not to be thankful for them is base ingratitude; but not to feel, that whether used or not used, appreciated or not appreciated, they are many and undeserved—this is to deny that you ever received them, or, claiming them as a right, to defy GOD to withhold them! Cultivate then, I pray you, this feeling of unworthiness; and, that you may do so the more readily, review the mercies, the promises made true which you have received; and tell out their number, their kind, and their magnitude to the GOD Who gave them, and would have them acknowledged. "With my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands." Now the argument of these words is, "I do not come to Thee, professing that I am a fit person to be helped, but I claim Thee as a GOD who are wont to help such as I

am. I am not worthy of the least of Thy mercies: but yet Thou hast shown me marvellous mercies. I possess now the evidences and pledges of Thy goodness. Therefore I pray for, I humbly count on further blessing, not because I am a holy man, but because Thou art a good GOD, and My good GOD." It is an argument which prevails with GOD. He is pleased to see that we recognise His former gifts, that we make *them*—and not ourselves, our love of Him, our obedience, our prayers, and fastings, and study of His Word, and use of His grace—the ground of application. He likes that His consistent faithfulness should be invoked; that since He has made a beginning, just on that very account, He should be looked to (so as it be humbly), to continue His work, and to accomplish it. When you go to GOD to ask for fresh blessings, you cannot take with you better and more effectual words than those which make mention of, which exhibit as promises and pledges, what you have already received.

But these words are not simply an argument for further help; they are, besides, a free acknowledgment, a pure praise of what has been given. They may be the plea of a beseeching heart, but they are besides the tribute of a grateful heart;

and it is in this sense, brethren, that I specially wish you to adopt them to-night, and to make them a thanksgiving to GOD for past mercies reviewed. "With my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands." Jacob might have found mercies enough to enlist his gratitude in any one year, or circumstance of his exile and pilgrimage, and doubtless he reviewed each and all particularly; but in his speech he comprehended all in a general mention of them, and summed them up, and demonstrated them by pointing to their effect. "Now I am become two bands." Review your past mercies, consider how GOD has been with you at all times, and has ever been doing you good. Call to mind what progress you have been able to make spiritual or temporal; what success has attended you; what friends have been given you; what dangers you have narrowly escaped; what sicknesses recovered from; what wounds been healed, what troubles overcome, what tears staunched. Have they not caused you, like Jacob, to increase from the solitariness and poverty of that passing over Jordan, to the riches and prosperity of the two bands? Perhaps you say, you cannot trace such progress; you are much the same outwardly and inwardly, as you have been from the time that you can first

remember. Then, brethren, you can furnish your own testimony, that GOD has dealt better with you than He did with Jacob, that your first state, your continued state has been all like his last. O discern and bless GOD for those least heeded but greatest mercies, the mercies which come to us at the beginning, and follow us all the days of our life—the continued prosperity of our family, the continued harmony and love, the bread always sure, the right understanding early implanted, the fear of the LORD from our youth. There is a way of travelling in our days which is so smooth, that often we cannot tell that we are moving; and there is a manner of blessing, so uninterrupted, so uniform, so without roughnesses and stoppages and ups and downs, that if we be not on the look-out, we may fancy that we are not blessed at all. Let not this be your case. Do not refuse to be grateful, because all goes well with you, because there is nothing that needs to be supplied, because nothing is taken away from you. Rather, let the measure of your blessedness be also the measure of your praise and the strength of your resolution. "Surely goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever."

But your object, perhaps, "Mine has not been

this life of uninterrupted prosperity, but, on the contrary, one of continued adversity. It is Jacob's first, not his last estate, that has been always mine." What do you mean? That you were not born rich, nor influential, nor of honoured family? That you have not the wisdom of the philosopher, the dignity of the prince, the opulence of the successful merchant, the leisure of independent private life? That may be. Your state may be the reverse of all this, and yet be the state of the "two bands." External prosperity in Jacob's time was commonly, yet not always, the sign of spiritual blessings; in Gospel days, with our better light, and greater power of appreciation of the reality, the sign is not so often afforded, frequently the most favoured are without it; yea, and often it abides with the unblessed as the mocking substitute for true blessedness. If you are without God in the world; if you do not feel Him about your bed, and about your path; if you do not live in His fear, and hope for His mercies, and His rewards; if the thought of Him does not moderate your worldly joy, and direct your aims, and leaven your worldly work; if His comfort does not dry your tears, His strength support you, His grace sanctify you, then—no matter what your outward state, and

your possessions, your powers, your happiness—you are poor and unblessed. But if He is thus with you in all your ways, if you have resolved, and are keeping the resolution, "The LORD shall be my GOD," then is yours the state, or it is growing towards the state of the "two bands." One more objection somewhat akin to this last, must be answered. There are some who say, "Mine was once the state of the two bands: it has long since been—or it is fast becoming—solitariness and the single staff. All thing are against me. Nothing that I put my hand to seems to prosper; I come into misfortune; the fountains of joy are dried up; my hope, my stay, are taken from me. When I look back upon the past, I look as it were up an incline down which I have rolled, or towards a pinnacle whence I have been cast down." Now, of course, my brethren, all this may be the result of the displeasure of GOD, consequent upon your sin, or neglect of Him. Outward adversity is sometimes the effect of His wrath, sometimes it is the chastisement of displeasure, and the discipline of correction. If then in your heart, you know that you deserve such wrath, or need such correction (even then it is a blessing, and you ought to praise GOD for it, but still) you may be sure that

it is the mark of disapprobation, something for you to grieve over, and seek to have removed. But if the testimony of your conscience is that you walk with GOD, then are these so-called reverses very blessings, not declines but advances, not hindrances but helps, tokens of GOD's love upraisings of you towards heaven. Oh be like Jacob; count all mercy, get rid of selfishness, and meditate as he did, and you will prove that all is mercy, and proclaim it! You will find, for instance, that the loss of wealth took away with it the idol of your worship, the minister of your excessive pleasure; that altered position broke down your pride; that worldly sorrow led you to seek heavenly comfort; that the perfidy of so-called friends made you cease to put your trust in man, and caused you to rely on the friend that sticketh closer than a brother; that sickness and infirmity reminded you of death, and stimulated you to preparation for judgment; that the loss of those you loved, uprooted your clingings to earth, linked you to heaven, revealed to you One whom you knew not; Whom above all you ought to love; Who is better to you than sons and daughters; Who is the true and abiding Father of the fatherless, and GOD of the widow. No matter what your circumstances, how many

your troubles, I tell you on the authority of God's Word, that if you love Him, they all work together for your good; yea, they are all good in themselves. You will find them so, if you rightly review them, and each of you will be able to say, as truthfully as Jacob did, with much more meaning, because of your better knowledge and superior blessedness in CHRIST, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth, which Thou hast showed unto my servant. . . . . I am become two bands."

Try to feel this, brethren, and to express it this night to GOD; to tell out your praises for the mercies of your past life, and, in the review of them, to pledge yourselves to Him, that you will strive henceforth to recognise blessings more quickly, to use them better, to be more grateful for them. Be these the thoughts and vows with which you consecrate the last hours of a dying year. But, knowing that so soon as you set out again, your enemy, whom sin has given the advantage over you, will come to meet you, to smite you, to turn you back from the Holy Land, forget not this night to cry, "Deliver me, I pray Thee, O LORD. Take away from me the sin which exposes me to assaults, which makes me vulnerable. Give me Thy strength: go before

me with thy blessing." Do this, brethren, persevere in it day after day, night after night: wrestle with God, refuse to let Him go—you shall surely prevail: GOD will yield all you ask; and, in honour of your victory, He will change your name from Jacob to Israel, that is, you shall no longer be remembered by the name of your deceit and your sin. You shall be known, known to angels, known to Him, as princes, and prevailers with GOD.

SERMON VIII.

WORKING FOR GOD.

ST. JOHN, IX., 4.

I must work the works of Him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.

I DWELL not on these words in their relation to the context. I pause not to consider whether their utterance was a justification of the Sabbath-day miracle that was presently to be performed—"no opportunity must be lost, no delay allowed of working the works of GOD"—or whether they were but the thinking and resolving aloud (so characteristic of our LORD), by which He kept ever in mind His great mission, by which He continually stimulated and pressed on that human nature of His; willing indeed, but yet weak, though not sinful; and made it vigorously industrious in the work of GOD; or whether, once more, CHRIST here but personified Christians, and spoke not of Himself, not to keep Him-

self mindful and intent upon His work, but as their example and representative, as though He had said, "A work of GOD will now be manifested in the restoration of this blind man. It will not be delayed till the Sabbath is over. See me serving GOD and serving Him now, by instant doing of all possible work. Consider me your example. Let this be your resolution, 'I must work the works of Him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.'" It matters little to us what feeling or motive immediately prompted our LORD to speak the text. His words at once commend themselves to us as those which we may, which we ought to adopt, even if they belong primarily to Him; which, rather, since they were the ruling maxim of CHRIST, must be the ruling maxim of Christians.

Well, then, these are our words (and CHRIST has shown us how to fulfil them), "I must work the works of Him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work."

"Him that sent me." Have we yet to learn, my brethren, that GOD sent us into this world; that we came not here by chance, or on our own account; that we are not independent beings, free to wander about or linger to do, or forbear to do, as we please? By the will—for the accom-

plishment of the purposes—of GOD, we are here on a mission, His messengers, His agents, workers for Him. GOD has made all things for His own use and glory. None of us liveth unto himself—He sent us forth. He gave us a charge. He watches to see what we do with it. He waits for our return; rather, He appoints, and, whensoever He will, enforces our return. And what is the mission? What has He sent us to do? To work the works of GOD, and make them manifest, to promote, to show forth His glory, to become ourselves all that He would have us to be, and to light and guide others to the same end. Work for GOD! How few ever think of such a thing! Work for themselves (and for others like themselves) for food to eat and raiment to put on, for money, for power, for fame, for pleasure; men understand this; they acknowledge the necessity of it, or the inviting, constraining desirableness of it, and they do it—do it generally, do it well, and heartily. A really idle man, a man that works not some works, is a rarity, an object of contempt when he is seen, a despiser of himself. But, work for GOD! How many do that? Who does it heartily, and does it well? Whose thoughts are full of it, whose deeds accomplish it? What *fruits* come of it? There are some, not a few,

thank GOD! who can give a satisfactory answer to such questions; whose lives continually give it, and whom GOD, for their works' sake in CHRIST, greatly approves. But I speak now to the many, yea, I speak to all; for the work of GOD so generally neglected, is by none perfectly performed. To all, then, I solemnly address the questions: "Do you work for GOD?" and "What work do you work for Him?" You are tempted to justify yourselves. You are not the unbelieving, and rebellious, and profane of our race. You recognise a GOD of providence and grace, a moral ruler of the world, a waiting Judge. To this GOD you say your prayers, His word you read, and reverence, and receive. To Him you dedicate at least several hours of each seventh day; by His commandments you order your daily life. You do no wrong to your neighbour by word or deed; you strive to purify and sanctify your very feelings and thoughts; you believe in a Saviour; you accept His salvation; you try to love Him; you partake of His means of grace; you rest in Him, and look to Him for final redemption, and something you do occasionally by way of persuading others; and something you give for the furtherance of religious works. It is well, brethren, if you do this; if you go through the

form, and do not inwardly contradict what is outward, but rather incline to it.

It is well, I say, because it is hopeful, it will, by grace, lead you farther; but if in your heart and soul you recognise GOD, and believe in a Saviour, then I am sure that you will not adduce what I have mentioned as specimens of the works of GOD. Acknowledgments that GOD ought to be served, pledges of service, they may be, but works they are not. And yet some, perhaps, would urge, "When the question was put, 'What must we do that we may work the works of GOD?' did not CHRIST answer, 'This is the work of GOD, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent"? and, say they, "Does not this show that literal working, as we work in and for the world, is not what GOD demands; that it is rather a mental assent, an entertaining and exercising of feelings, a believing, a thankful, a sanctifying remembrance of CHRIST'S work; a trust in it, a carefulness to do nothing that will render it ineffectual for our salvation, that is required of us? Surely, CHRIST has done the work Himself; we have but to accept it thankfully, and wait for it faithfully and holily."

Now, my brethren, it may be easily shown that this is not believing in Him whom GOD hath sent.

To believe in Him is to embrace Him as the Author, and Finisher, and Giver of Salvation; to be assured that salvation can only be had from Him, in Him, and on His terms; to learn of Him, therefore—and, of course, of His Apostles and Evangelists after Him, for to them even clearer teaching was intrusted—what are the terms, and then to fulfil them resolutely and precisely. Do you need that I should quote the actual words, the chapter, and verse, in which CHRIST, through the Spirit, tells us, that He has redeemed us to Himself; that He has purchased us for a peculiar people zealous of good works; that He has left us a definite work to do against His return; that on His return He will judge and reward us by our works; that He will condemn as workers against Him those who have not worked for Him; that it is vain to acknowledge Him and not do the things that He bids; that He has left us an example that we should follow His steps, in that He fulfilled all righteousness, and went about doing good, and proposed to Himself, as that which must be done, and done heartily and without delay, the works and the manifesting of the works of GOD, and made it His meat and drink to do the Father's will; that He has said plainly, that whosoever would not take up the cross and

follow Him could not be His disciple. O wo to those who dare to say this means: Sit still in worldliness, and look at and admire Him doing the labour and pursuing the path of godliness—that He has attached all His promises to certain deeds; that He is ever represented as judging, not what men have thought and felt, but what they have done and become by doing; that by the Spirit He has commanded "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;" and "Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God;" and "He that gathereth not, scattereth abroad"? Oh, my brethren, let us be honest; we know, we dare not deny it, that a work, rather that many works are imposed upon us by God, and that it will not do for us merely to think of them, to sigh over them, to approach them carelessly, reluctantly, to call preferred employments by their name; but that with clear understanding with heart-devotion, with constant application and real labour, we must do the works of Him that sent us.

And, now, what are the works?

The first, and most vitally important, is, to "work out our own salvation;" not to attempt of ourselves to undo what Adam did; not by any

course of zealous doing to seek to recommend ourselves to GOD as deserving a reward, to propose to purchase heaven, to go to GOD the Father directly for it, and expect to get it from Him, either as a right or as a gift of compassion: but, knowing that it is only to be had of CHRIST, to seek it from CHRIST in appointed ways, in the measure, on the conditions which He has prescribed for all, and to fulfil the conditions. We are not naturally born in grace; we do not naturally inherit glory. CHRIST, by right, the Saviour of all men, is, in fact, "specially" only the Saviour of them that believe; of them who actually apply to Him and depend on Him, and remain in communion with Him for grace; who serve Him by fulfilling His commands and copying His example, who use His grace and grow in it, and by its power transform themselves into the character which alone can dwell in heaven. Now, all this is work—real, anxious, laborious work; this obeying of CHRIST, this imitation of His example, and following in His steps, this putting off of the old man and putting on of the new man. Are you intent upon it? Do you perform it? Consider the means of grace, prayer, praise, divine instruction, holy communion; do you faithfully and diligently use them? Read the Deca-

logue with the commentary of the Sermon on the Mount. Can you honestly say, All this I keep and do? Study the life of CHRIST—is your life like it: like it in humility, in self-denial, in labour, in fact, in hope, in aim? Examine yourselves. Are you cleansed from evil propensities —are you adorned with Christian graces—are you fit in person, in will, in desire, for a heaven full of holiness, whose employment will be the doing of GOD's work, as angels do it, whose relaxation, if I may so speak, will be the contemplation and the praise of GOD? What do you leave undone, what do you transgress of GOD's will? What covetousness do you root out, what evil tempers do you subdue, what rash zeal do you curb, what indolence do you overcome? Are you worldly, sensual, ill-natured, proud, self-seeking? Have you any trace of these stains upon you? Are you wanting in obedience, in patience, in holiness, in love of GOD? You cannot enter heaven, it would close its gates against you, you would flee from it as a place of torment, while you are in such a state. Now, what are you doing, or attempting to appropriate CHRIST's salvation, to secure GOD's approbation, to qualify yourselves in character, in taste and desire for a purely spiritual, a gloriously holy heaven? You know

what concentrated thought, what single aim, what diligent, anxious, persevering labour are necessary to make you good scholars, able statesmen, accomplished members of society, successful tradesmen, apt mechanics; or, to descend lower, ordinary earners of daily bread. You may guess, then, what measure of these things is needed to perfect you in saintliness, and therefore you are able to answer the question—oh, how must you answer it?—whether you fulfil the acknowledged requirement of the text, "I must work the works of Him that sent me."

But, besides this, so to speak, selfish work, you have a work to do for and upon others. GOD Who wills to inform, and persuade, and save the world, appoints men, appoints you to accomplish His will. Like as CHRIST, besides qualifying Himself to be the Saviour, had also to proclaim, and recommend, and bestow salvation, so have you, while putting yourselves in the way of salvation, and diligently pursuing it, to be lights, and voices, and helping hands to others. You are lights of the world; you are ambassadors for CHRIST; you are your brothers' keepers; you are teachers of GOD'S Word, and advocates of His cause, and treasurers of His gifts; you are under shepherds of CHRIST; you are fellow-

workers with Him, and dispensers of His manifold grace. GOD has given you these offices, and He has placed you where you may exercise them. He has given you authority over your children, and servants, and dependents. He has lent you influence over friends and associates. He has planted you in the midst of crowds of ignorant, indifferent, ungodly, that you may work for Him, in guiding, and persuading, and leading to salvation, in making manifest His glory. He has put into your power to contribute something—into the power of some to contribute much—to the various associations (which are, in fact, your agents), for doing the work of GOD in building and endowing additional churches, in providing more clergymen at home, in sending missionaries to the colonist and the heathen. You think, perhaps, that in the chief part of what I have said, I have been describing the clergy, and not the laity. But, brethren, the clergy are nothing but representatives, representatives, on the one hand, of GOD, teaching, exhorting, ministering grace in His name, by and from Him; representatives, on the other hand, of your prayers, and praises, and your works. You know whose would be the blame, and how great the blame, and how terrible the consequences, if the minister only con-

fessed to GOD and praised Him, and partook of His sacraments. It is just the same, if he only teaches, and exhorts, and visits, and tends, and relieves; an empty sign, a mockery, a provocation of wrath, which will surely descend on those who cause it to be unreal, on those who do not make it real. Ministers we are, coming from GOD to you, going to GOD from you. Oh, you cannot suppose that if you leave two or three clergymen to deal with thousands of people, to inform them, to persuade them, to become acquainted with their wants, to relieve them out of their own poor means, you cannot suppose I say that in so doing, you are working the works of GOD, that when you have said your prayers, and listened to the sermon, and paid your pew rents, and dropped a superfluous coin into the plate of an occasinal collection, you have obeyed and imitated CHRIST. No, brethren, you are under no such delusion of Satan. An awful responsibility is indeed upon the clergy. We have sworn to give ourselves wholly to a work in which your part is to support, and succour, and enable us. We are pledged to forego opportunities of acquiring fame, and gainingwealth and power, and taking pleasure. Wo to us, if we disregard the oath, if we cling to the things which we profess to have

renounced! But if we fail, that will not excuse you; and if we are faithful without your adherence, the reward will be ours, the blood guiltily shed, or guiltily unstaunched, will be upon your heads. It is a solemn theme which I am discussing this morning, and I dare not but speak plainly upon it. Our fidelity will not profit you if you are not helpers of us. Our unfaithfulness, though we perish in it, will be visited on you, if you do not enable us, if you do not constrain us, by the power with which you should endow us, by the jealous concern which you should have for our work, by the diligent co-operation which you should exercise with us. It is easy to say, that you are not qualified for this, that your time is all engaged in your worldly calling, that you cannot spare from the means of your support, from the capital of your business, the money which the Church calls for. But, brethren, consider, that though God requires you to maintain yourselves and your families, though your worldly callings are appointed for you by God, though He allows you to give much time to them, to advance and enrich yourselves by them, yet all this is on the condition that you do not withhold from Him the direct service and offerings which constitute the one thing needful, the reward of which is all that

shall survive this life, and this world! It was the fashion once among religionists to despise, to pronounce unclean (unfitting for the Christian), the use of the world, its callings, its profits, its pleasures. There is much danger of an opposite fashion prevailing in our days. The confining of religious service and worship to the honest, respectable, intellectual, liberal pursuit of some worldly vocation, "the religion of common life" as it is called, being regarded, not as the companion, —rather the handmaid—but the substitute (and a very good one, too) for pure spiritual religion. Both are wrong. The Christian may use the world, and in the right use of it he may be serving GOD. But he must not abuse it; and he does abuse it, if he allows himself to be engrossed by it; if he brings himself to a state, if he continues willingly in a state, where he is obliged to say, "I cannot spare any time or any money, my first thought, and concern, and provision must be for this life."

You have heard, or read, perhaps, that a contented, conscientious, and cheerful abiding in and following of our worldly occupations, that even the housemaid's sweeping and cleaning may be religious worship; and there is truth in the statement, otherwise the Apostle could not have ex-

horted "Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of GOD;" but, the Scriptural injunction means, "Prolong the remembrance of your spiritual worship: testify your yearning to get back to it: keep the face shining, when you come down from the glorious mount, so that while the world demands your bodies, your souls, your hearts and spirits may still be given to GOD, and even the bodily acts spiritualised by doing them in submission, in holy observance of the will of GOD, in thankful use of the means of support and helps to usefulness, which He thus affords you." Worldly occupations and worldly goods are to the Christian what meals, and recreations, and sleep are to men generally: necessaries, supports of the lower life, refreshments, and invigorators for something better. Give yourselves wholly to these and you become sensualists, idlers, sluggards; and give yourselves wholly to the world and you are followers of Mammon and forsakers of GOD! You see the right use of the world, as far as this life is concerned, when the son toils to support an aged parent, when the young man struggles to get on, that he may establish a home, when the father seeks through his profession to provide for his family, when the lover of literature diligently tries to make his calling afford

him money for books and time to read them. This is employing the world as a necessary means to a desired end. And so you see the right use of the world, in regard to a better life, in him who labours and perseveres, and advances in it with the view of getting as much out of it as he can for GOD.

Be sure that there are none so busy but, in the midst of their business, they can think of what they like better; none so pressed for time, but they can spare some of it, if they have a mind to; none so poor as to have nothing to spend on what they covet. So use the world, and, in using it, you will work the works of GOD, because you will often take from it, and often come out from it, for the direct and more purely spiritual works of GOD.

But CHRIST, our pattern, said not merely "I must work the works of GOD," but I must do them "while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work." We know what that meant in His case. He had taken human nature in its weakness, and He had to bring it to its full strength, to fit it for glory and exaltation to the throne of GOD. He had in His life to speak the word of GOD to many people, and in many places, and each opportunity must be seized, or others

would be forfeited. He had to relieve present sufferings, and to supply present wants; to meet necessities while they were pressing. Soon the time would come for Him to go to the Father: then He must be perfect; then He would have no more opportunity in the flesh for benefitting man and glorifying GOD; then He could make no more preparation for the setting up of His Church.

The words have a similar meaning with regard to us; but in our cases the necessity is more urgent, the delay more awful, because we have no fixed time allotted us—"to-day, and to-morrow, and the third day I must be perfected." Our life is to be taken from us without our consent, and may be taken at any moment; we have not power to lay it down when we will, and power to keep it as long as we will. And, besides, we have not been using each year, each day, each hour, to the best advantage. We have left undone much which we ought to have done, we have done much which we ought not to have done. We have all this to correct, and yet to give full attention to the works yet remaining.

Look we in at ourselves, brethren, and see what requires to be done in us before we are fit for heaven. Listen to the cries of spiritual dis-

tress, and consider what has to be supplied. Think of the souls that are dying, and will soon be dead, if we do not revive them. Remember we what frail, short-continuing, dying creatures we are; how soon at the latest, how suddenly, it may be abruptly, without a moment's warning, we may be called to present ourselves, to be dealt with according to our fitness, to give account of our works for GOD.

Let the arrival of a new year set us reviewing the past year, with its catalogue of offences, of neglects, of things to be wiped out, debts to be paid, progress to be quickened. Let us heed well its injunction and its warning, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might, for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave whither thou goest." Let us look up for the opening clouds and listen for the Advent voice, "Behold, I come quickly, and My reward is with Me to give to every man according as his works shall be;" and let us instantly resolve and instantly begin to perform our resolution and persevere in it, nor dare to forget it: "I must work the works of Him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work."

SERMON IX.

CHRIST'S TRUEST MANIFESTATION.

ST. JOHN, XIV., 22.

Lord, how is it that Thou wilt manifest Thyself unto us, and not unto the world.

ON the festival of the Epiphany, and on several Sundays afterwards, we commemorate what are called manifestations of CHRIST; revelations and exhibitions of Him, in His nature, His person, His might, His wisdom, His various offices. In one sense, CHRIST'S whole life, from the manger in Bethlehem to the Mount of the Ascension, was a manifestation. It was not possible to see or hear Him, without becoming convinced—if open to conviction—that He was different from all other men, and superior to them. His every deed, His every word, His every look, designedly or undesignedly proclaimed "This is GOD manifest in the flesh!" Still, there were some *particular* exhibitions of Himself, which, from

the special circumstances attending them, the preparation made for them, their peculiar importance, their wonderful effects, or their relations to certain classes or individuals, are entitled to be distinguished from the rest of that life-long Epiphany, and to be called *par excellence* the manifestations of CHRIST.

Of this kind, was the exhibition to the shepherds, and again, that to the wise men of the East—prefiguring, commencing the manifestation to the Gentiles; the declaration that He must be about His Father's business, the baptism by John, the show of His power in converting water into wine, in cleansing the leper, in calming the troubled sea, in casting out devils; the unfolding of His wisdom in speaking parables, the preaching of judgment by the Son of Man—all of which are in turn commemorated at this season. Of this kind, again, were the teaching on the Mount, all the miracles, the Tranfiguration, the appearances after the Resurrection, the Ascension, the wonders of Pentecost, the light that shone from heaven on Saul journeying to Damascus, and the voice that said "I am JESUS whom thou persecutest." These were all pre-eminent manifestations, as being designedly full of significance, making special revelations to special persons;

displaying, so to speak, the chief features of CHRIST, and teaching most important lessons. Nevertheless, they were rather preludes and signs of CHRIST'S truest manifestation, than that manifestation itself—faint glimmers of coming light, rustlings, warning movements, scarcely upliftings of the curtain that hung between things spiritual and the would-be spectators of them—parables, and prophecies. They left not those who saw them where they were, but they carried them not whither they would be or should be. They bade them look and listen; but they revealed not the sight, nor spake the word. Strange as it may seem, CHRIST was not truly manifested till the clouds of heaven hid Him, and, in the flesh, He ceased to appear and speak till judgment-time. The truth was, as yet, not taught, but only hinted at, and men were not yet ready for it, and could not receive it. It is not in what we call the Gospels, but in the Epistles, that the truth as it is in JESUS is revealed. It is not in the miracles of His earthly ministry, but in the spiritual wonders which, after Pentecost, the Apostles wrought in His name; that the real power of CHRIST, the power to bless, is seen and felt. All before was but a type, a shadow, a dream. The antitype, the reality, the waking vision, belong to apostolic

days, and to the days after them. Then was the Gospel revealed, which before was only brought nigh. Then was the kingdom of Heaven opened. Then did JESUS, through the Spirit, begin to speak and show Himself openly and plainly to Jews and Gentiles, and to draw all men to Him. Then did spiritual wisdom begin to enlighten, and spiritual power begin to enable the hitherto blind and helpless. Then first, even to the Apostles, and then, by them, to the world, began to be displayed GOD manifest in the flesh. Up to that time, though He was in the world, the world knew Him not. He stood among them, but they did not see Him; He spoke, but they did not hear: yea, though He had come to His own, they did not receive Him, till the Pentecostal light made all clear, and the voice of the Spirit declared "This is the beloved Son of the Father," and the power of Divine grace, enabled and constrained to believe on His name, to receive Him intelligently and heartily, and through Him, and in a measure like Him, to become sons of GOD.

Then and thus was CHRIST truly manifested, as it were in these last times.

But there is even yet a better manifestation, one more really worthy of the name—that, namely,

which is made to the Disciples, but not to the world.

In a sense, all that has hitherto been described was an external manifestation—a manifestation to the world. The Gospel was preached openly, the credentials of its heralds were publicly exhibited, whosoever would might hear and see; and only when they refused, and judged themselves unworthy of eternal life, did the Apostles turn away from them, or pass on to another place, shaking the dust off their feet as a testimony against them. Even the inward grace, the power to see spiritually, to believe, and to accept CHRIST, was so far manifested to the world, that it was offered to all, and was within the reach of all. The Apostles, who taught men their need of salvation, and exhorted them to save themselves, both showed them the way and promised them the grace of salvation; and thus, therefore, was CHRIST openly, and with power, manifested to the world. But, in the chapter of the text, CHRIST makes it a special promise to those that love Him, that He will manifest Himself to them. Judas (not Iscariot) rightly concludes that this is a manifestation which shall be made to none but approved disciples; and, accepting the promise, he ventures to ask, respecting its

fulfilment, "LORD, how is it that Thou wilt manifest Thyself unto us, and not unto the world?"

It must be borne in mind that the Jewish notion, a notion shared by the disciples, was that the MESSIAH would manifest Himself in all the pomp and power of a triumphant earthly prince, exhibiting Himself to the whole world, ruling all the nations of the earth, and demanding the homage and adoration of all men. They waited in expectation that the kingdom of Israel would be restored, that Jerusalem would become the capital of the world, that CHRIST would sit visibly on a splendid throne, in the midst of her, and that they would occupy the nearest places to Him of honour and power. This notion was still theirs, as we know, when CHRIST led them out to the Mount of the Ascension; and we can well understand, therefore, that Judas, and those with him, must at this time have been greatly perplexed by the intimation, which CHRIST'S promise conveyed, that He was only to be manifested to those that love Him. It is out of this perplexity—not, as I said before, questioning the fact of a partial manifestation, but unable to understand it, and seeking enlightenment—that Judas asks, "LORD, how is it that

Thou wilt manifest Thyself unto us, and not unto the world?"

The words translated "How is it," render possible a threefold interpretation of this question. 1st. LORD, what has happened—how is it come to pass that the original design (at least, what we suppose to be the original design) of an universal manifestation is altered, and now only a partial manifestation to be afforded? 2ndly. LORD, what has been done by us, what special merits have we, whence is it that we are to be so signally favoured, and others passed over? 3rdly. LORD, what kind of manifestation will that be which some eyes only shall perceive? In what way wilt Thou reveal Thy presence to us, so that the world, in the midst of which we dwell, into the midst of which, therefore, Thou must come to us, shall not partake with us of the vision. It is scarcely profitable, perhaps, to consider whether or no the first interpretation is admissible; nor need we attempt to decide between the second and the third. Let us rather combine them; and taking the question out of Judas's mouth, and adopting it as our own, let us reverently and teachably ask, as we need, of Him who giveth wisdom liberally, "LORD, how is it, on what account, and in what way, that Thou wilt ma-

nifest Thyself unto us, and not unto the world?"

I. On what account is He partial? Why does He make us to differ? Not then, for any recommendation we had to His favour—for we were all concluded under sin, and all guilty before GOD. Not again, for any merits or deserts in His service, for at the best, if we have done all that He set us to do (and who has?) we are yet but unprofitable servants. No! there was nothing which should make GOD respect and choose us before others; and we have done no work for which we can claim reward. GOD is no respecter of persons. It is impossible, by any mere natural deeds or efforts to please Him. We have all sinned and come short of His glory. We all sin, and deserve wrath every day. But CHRIST, Who would have all men to be saved, Who has died for all, and risen again for all, and sent down His Holy Spirit ready to justify, to sanctify, to bless all, has nevertheless made the bestowal of His grace conditional. He requires a certain "receptivity" for it. It is not thrust upon all, willing or unwilling, proud or humble, GOD-fearing or GOD-despising. Men must feel their need of it; and, feeling their need, they must express it, at least to Him, and must go to Him in His appointed

ways to obtain it. CHRIST in sufficiency, in desire, the Saviour of all men, is, in fact, specially only the Saviour of them that believe—believe with that impelling desire, and that active faith, which make them flee to Him to be saved, and earnestly ask of Him, "What must I do to be saved?" And next, having this fitness, this receptivity for grace, and so receiving it, CHRIST requires men to treasure up the grace with reverence and godly fear; to use it with diligence, with zealous effort, to improve it, to grow in it; to strengthen it constantly by all appointed means of sustenance and exercise; to accomplish with it all that He wills and directs to be done; to be heartily grateful to the Author, the Sustainer, the Finisher of Salvation. "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me, and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him." So then it is only to love that the manifestation is made; and love is proved by obedience, and obedience is the hearty faithful performance, in the spirit as well as the letter, of the expressed will of CHRIST.

And here, brethren, before we go further, let us see in the light of these conditions, why it is that religious influences affect so little the vast

mass of mankind. There IS a manifestation of CHRIST to the world. He is ever speaking in their ears and showing Himself to their eyes. His Church, with its Bible, its means of grace and ministry, its duration and extension, besides being a standing miracle, the infallible credential of His divine authority, the proof of His wisdom and His power, is a very exhibition of Himself, mighty and eager to save. The Spirit, which is with and in that Church, declares Himself to be able and ready to enlighten, and persuade, and strengthen all, without exception, without delay, if only they will come to Him. And yet how many, not only of the recklessly profane, the grossly carnal, the resolutely blind and deaf, but of the well-disposed, the moral, the albut exemplary, have no perception whatever of CHRIST! How many so-called Christians, not only in their business or their pleasure, when they turn away their eyes from the manifested GOD, but even when they come up to the sanctuary, when they read the Bible, when they kneel in prayer or stand to praise, when they look Zionwards, when they are all attent, eyes and ears, yet see no sight, and hear no sound of CHRIST! The world which they have left is remembered, and stands before them in a life-like picture. The sights they would not see, the

sounds they would not hear, they cannot escape from; but CHRIST, the object of their worship, in some sense the desire of their eyes, they look for but cannot find; if He stands in the midst of them, they know it not!

Is not this, brethren, the experience of many of you? You do not, of course, ever expect open visions, perceptions with natural eyes and ears of a spiritually manifested Saviour; but do you not often fail to obtain what you think (and rightly) you ought to aim at obtaining, a real, though spiritual, a convincing, constraining, sanctifying, and cheering manifestation of CHRIST? Do you not often, do you not almost always find just that wanting, which should make religion real? "Oh!" you exclaim, "would that when I kneel down in church, to make solemn confessions, to utter supplications, to pray for pardon, for favour, for grace —oh! that such a vision of CHRIST were afforded me, that I were possessed with such feeling of His presence, as would prevent my turning away so readily from the solemnity, to see who is coming into church, to admire or criticise the dress or appearance of those beside me, to remember the worldliness of yesterday, to anticipate the worldliness of to-morrow. Oh! that when I sit with open Bible before me, and slight and slur

over its difficult parts, and give little heed to the personal application of its histories, and treat albut with indifference its exhortations, its warnings, its promises, its threats—Oh! that some voice would recall me from my wandering, and dispel my irreverence, and concentrate my devout attention with its heard command, 'Thus, saith the LORD, Hear what the Spirit saith.' Oh! that when I go about the world, and neglect my religious duty here, and transgress it there, yielding readily to temptation, hankering after, following worldliness, led by the persuasions, awed by the frowns, constrained by the demands of the world, oh! that CHRIST would stand at least before my spiritual vision, and utter to the ears of my soul, 'Forbear. Take up thy cross. Follow me.' Oh, that He would do all this for others too: for those whom I love, who go farther out of the way, for the carnal, for the godless, for the souls that are carelessly, that are deliberately perishing! Oh! that for His own honour's sake He would openly show Himself and dispute—with the Devil, with Mammon, with Pleasure, with Folly—the possession of the souls which He has purchased for Himself! Why does He not give some proof, why does He not exercise some persuasion which must be felt, which could not be

disregarded? Oh! that He would rend the heavens and come down; that He would cheer the saint; that He would confound and convert the sinner by His manifested presence."

It is thus, if I mistake not, that we sometimes think and wish. But, brethren, the words which prompted Judas to speak, reprove our thoughts. They show us that it is not by oversight, by defect, by mismanagement, by any failure to accomplish what was intended, but by deliberate design, by exact fulfilment of what GOD proposed, that the real, the strong influences of Christianity are not brought to bear upon men generally.

CHRIST manifests not Himself fully to the world. He never meant to do it. He never will do it, till he comes to judgment.

GOD, we are told, "will have mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth." These awful words do not mean what some attempt to make out of them—that there is an arbitrary election to salvation, and so for all others an inevitable destruction. They mean rather that while His mercy is ready to flow, and is always flowing, if you desire it, you must go to the fountain for it. GOD is under no necessity to save all men. We do not confer a favour on Him by consenting to be saved. His glory will be

manifested in destruction as in salvation. He desires to save us. He will save us, and rejoice in our salvation, if we seek to be saved: but if we are rebellious, or indifferent, if we will not comply with the conditions on which only He will manifest His best presence to us, then we must not complain, if He makes good His declaration, and proves it by withholding Himself from us, that whom He wills (and in what way He wills) on them He has mercy, and all others, though He long bears with them, and gives them much time and opportunity for conforming to His will, yet is He content, yea, determined to leave them in their hardness, to confirm them in their hardness, because they will not be softened in the way which He has chosen to prescribe.

Oh! my brethren, do not suppose that it is the weakness, the impotence of Christianity, the frustration of the will of GOD that is demonstrated in the world's ungodliness, in the perdition of so many immortal souls. No! It is rather the power of Christianity to keep its own for its own: it is the glorious vindication of the sovereign will of Jehovah to save whom He will; it is the corroboration of CHRIST'S word, that none should come to the Father but by Him; it is the terrible, deliberately-inflicted punishment of those that will

not come unto Him that they might have life; it is the manifestation, so to speak, of His non-manifestation: "If ye will not love me, holding my commandments and keeping them, then you cannot be loved of My Father, and so cannot be loved of Me, and I will not manifest myself to you."

It is ourselves, brethren, and not GOD that must be changed. The seed is scattered over all the field, but it grows only in the good ground. If CHRIST is not manifest to us, it is because we have not complied with the conditions of manifestation. He is faithful to His promise, but we have not closed with the promise. Realising, then, that it is not binding on GOD to save us—excepting on the terms which He has Himself laid down—and presenting to ourselves the momentous interests at stake, let us comply with GOD'S terms, and let us strive to do so gratefully. Let us be at pains to ascertain CHRIST'S will; let us diligently and scrupulously keep it, endeavouring all the while to follow it, not as mere routine of morality, but as active direct service of CHRIST Himself, and proposing to ourselves, as the motive to its observance, gratitude for CHRIST'S salvation, and as the reward of observance, the manifestation of CHRIST. So doing,

we shall soon find that there is a real, an unequalled power in Christianity to attract and constrain us; we shall soon know how it is that CHRIST will manifest Himself to His disciples, while He is hidden from the world.

II. I have left but little time for the consideration of the second form of our question, namely, in what way CHRIST will manifest Himself only to the chosen. There is no need of a lengthy discussion of this subject, because, with all our spiritual shortsightedness, we are not like the Jews, we can have no difficulty in understanding the possibility of CHRIST'S manifestation of Himself to whom He will, and at the same time His hiding of Himself from all others. We know that like as ghosts are sometimes said to appear to but one of a roomful, so if it pleased CHRIST —and in any other way which He pleased—He could stand visibly at this moment before any one of us, and utter to that favoured ear distinctly audible words, while the rest of us saw and heard nothing of Him.

And there is no use in the discussion of the nature of CHRIST'S truest manifestation, because even if the preacher had realised it in all its perfect blessedness, his words would fail to describe what he had felt; yea, the best possible descrip-

tion would be wholly unintelligible to the natural man who perceives not, and cannot perceive, the things of GOD, while it would be wholly unnecessary, rather would be solemn trifling with those who have actually partaken of the blessedness. No, brethren, it cannot be spoken—and if it could, I believe, it might not be—how CHRIST shows Himself to those who love Him and keep His commandments. It is only in its realisation that you can understand what the promise means: "We will come unto Him and make our abode with Him." Go, fulfil the conditions, and you shall receive the promise; and it shall disclose to you its own wonders, and its own transcendent bliss, and its own constraining power.

But though we may not describe the manifestation itself, we may observe and recount the effects it produces. The Israelites might not come up to GOD and see Him face to face in the Mount, but they were allowed, and it was good for them, to behold the shining of Moses's face when he returned from the Divine presence. Doubtless, to many, it was an additional proof of the being of GOD; to not a few it may have been an incentive to seek the blessing of His favour. And so, brethren, it may be with us. Taking knowledge of those who have been with JESUS, we may see

on them some reflection of His glorious self, some marks of a bliss which we shall covet to share, which may stimulate us both to believe better in its reality and to strive more earnestly for its fruition. Yes! and comparing ourselves with them very humbly, with unceasing prayer and watching against false confidence, we may even discern on ourselves the faint dawn, the first streaks of the Divine twilight, which tell (oh! how unspeakable the bliss!) that the dayspring is about to mount above our horizon; that the Sun of righteousness is about to shine into our hearts with all His glory.

Consider, then, such as Abraham, who, after He had seen CHRIST—for CHRIST was often manifest before the Incarnation—could himself resolutely destroy his best earthly hope if GOD required it; Job, who, after the vision of perfect holiness, abhorred himself and repented; Jacob, who felt (and felt throughout his life, we may be sure) how dreadful, how consecrated was the place where GOD was met; Joseph, who possessed a power to resist effectually the sin, which so many dare to say there is no resisting ("How can I do this great wickedness and sin against GOD?"); Daniel, who entered courageously into a den of lions; Simeon, who longed for death, and the en-

joyment of the permanent vision, after he had once seen CHRIST; Stephen, who died, almost like his Master, "LORD JESUS receive my spirit;" and the many others, who endured and laboured, and resisted, and persevered, and rejoiced in tribulation, and hoped against hope, as seeing Him who is invisible. Yes, brethren, consider these. Think what they were, men of the same flesh and blood, of like infirmities, and like sin with yourselves. Think how they secured the favour of GOD, by the same simple means which are within the power of the least of you, yea, and more within your power than theirs, at least of most of them, because of the clearer light, and the better grace of Gospel times. Think what a reflection they showed of the visions of CHRIST which they enjoyed. Think how real must have been their religious life; how enviable their peace and bliss; what a glorious light they afforded for the example and encouragement of other men; and be no longer content that with all your faculties and opportunities, all your knowledge and invitations, all your proffers of Divine grace, all the perpetual revelations of CHRIST to those who desire Him, you yet should never see Him; but resolutely accepting His terms, hold and keep His commandments, and pray, and meditate, and labour to *love Him.*

Then plead and watch—you shall not plead in vain, nor watch very long—and the Father, and the Son, and the Spirit will surely come unto you and make their abode manifestly within you, cheering you with the light of the Divine countenance, strengthening you with the strength of Divine grace, moulding you more and more into the image of CHRIST (which must be yours in perfection before you can partake of His fullest manifestation), abiding with you here, and shining clearly even in the deepest darkness, and by and by transplanting you, perfected in grace and spiritual perception, to the place where CHRIST is always seen, with an eye that shall never be dim, with a delight which, however it grows in desire, shall be more than satisfied, as you behold His face in righteousness, and are filled to overflowing with the fulness of His presence.

SERMON X.

BLESSING ACCORDING TO PRAYER.

ST. MATTHEW, VIII., 13.

And JESUS *said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee.*

WE must compare the narrative contained in St. Matthew's Gospel with its parallel in the 7th chapter of St. Luke, to obtain a clear and full idea of the circumstances which preceded the healing of the centurion's servant. St. Matthew records just so much of the history as would illustrate the teaching that the Gentiles from afar should be received, and many of the children of the kingdom cast out: St. Luke sets forth in order all the particulars, small and great, which he had been able to obtain from those who were eye-witnesses and ministers of the word.

From the harmonised accounts we gather that a certain centurion, who had renounced the worship of the "gods many," and become a proselyte

of the gate, hearing of the miracles of JESUS, sent certain elders of the Jews to beseech the exercise of His healing power upon a favourite servant, who was grievously tormented, and at the point of death. He does not seem to have come at all himself. The deep sense which he entertained of personal unworthiness would alone have deterred him; and, besides, he knew that there was a middle wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles, and that as yet JESUS was not sent but unto the house of Israel. The elders, come to JESUS, seek to enlist His sympathy and active interest, by pleading that the centurion, though not actually a Jew, was a friend of Jews, and had done much for the support of the Jewish worship. "He is worthy for whom Thou shouldst do this, for he loveth our nation, and himself hath built us a synagogue. Come, then, and heal his servant." JESUS replies, "I will come and heal him;" and straightway sets out with them. But when He was not far from the house, the centurion, alarmed at the temerity of his former request, and shrinking instinctively from One so high and so holy, sent some of those around him to prevent further condescension and trouble, on behalf of one so unworthy, and to suggest that JESUS should but express His will (which he felt

must be omnipotent) from the spot where He stood: "Say in a word and my servant shall be healed." The centurion had arrived at the knowledge of a great truth, namely, that CHRIST'S power was not confined to the scene of His bodily presence: and he described the process of reasoning by which he had arrived at it. "I am but a man, myself under authority, yet I have but to say, Go, come, do this, and, lo! it is done by my servants here, there, or wherever else I appoint, while I remain still. How much more shalt *Thou* speak and be obeyed, Thou who art Absolute and Supreme in authority, Whose will all the spiritual armies of heaven observe, and are prompt and eager to perform. 'Speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.'" When JESUS heard it, He marvelled and said to them that followed, "Verily, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." Twice we read that our LORD marvelled—once at unbelief, and once at belief. And this is no mere figurative statement. Our LORD literally marvelled. His human nature, much as He knew of what was in man, was taken aback by the unexpected and extraordinary display, in the one case of perverse blindness, in the other of clear spiritual perception. "Verily, I say unto you, I

have not found so great faith." It is remarkable that our LORD selects the centurion's *faith* for admiration. He dwells not on his care and anxiety for his slave, on his general good will and good deeds, on his consciousness of unworthiness, his resolute humility, "LORD, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof." No! it is his faith, to which JESUS gives this highest praise. That while he walked among His own people, who were taught of GOD, and was haughtily and indignantly treated, yea, despised; that while Jews saw and albut felt His power, and refused to acknowledge it, a Gentile, at a distance, should be filled with reverential awe of Him, should assert so confidently the fulness of His power, should have such an insight into its spiritual working, should find and adduce proofs of that power and its working, to satisfy himself, to plead to CHRIST—this was, indeed, worthy of note; this was, as yet, unparalleled. "I have not found so great faith."

We need not, however, suppose—in fact we must not suppose—that our LORD meant to omit the commendation of the centurion's other good qualities: rather as they were all the fruits of faith, were they all praised in the praise of faith. Why did he love the Jews—why did he build them a

synagogue—why did he seek miraculous healing for his servant—why did he employ Jewish elders as his intercessors—why did he, an important Roman officer, feel unworthy of the company of a wandering Jewish peasant? Was it not through faith? faith in the true GOD, faith in the laws of His worship, faith in His awful holiness, and no less in His merciful goodness, faith in His manifestation in JESUS of Nazareth? Yes, it was all of faith, and it was all admired and praised when JESUS marvelled and said, "I have not found so great faith." But still the highest faith—the thing most marvelled at and chiefly commended, was the spiritual perception of a bodily unseen LORD, the belief in His unlimited, and, under all circumstances, available power. "I have never seen Thee: yet I know Thee who Thou art. Thou art not here, yet with a word Thou canst cause Thy power to be here, and to accomplish here all Thy will." Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed: and blessed are they precisely in the way of their own wise choice, "Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee." It was great honour given to CHRIST. It was the opportunity of a wondrous manifestation, and so we read, "The servant was healed in the selfsame hour."

But shall we suppose that the centurion, by his humility and his faith, deprived himself of the bliss of receiving CHRIST, that CHRIST, *therefore,* turned away, and thought no more of him? Even in that case he would not have been without his reward. The servant, who was dear to him, was preserved and healed, the Jews, whom he loved, must have honoured and loved him, when he had thus prevailed with GOD, and, besides, what a conviction was his of the power of CHRIST, what a token of approval, in the fact that he had, as it were, proposed his own conditions for a miracle, and those conditions had been graciously accepted and fulfilled! He needed no vision after this to prove to him that JESUS was the Son of GOD; no voice from heaven to speak to him comfort and assurance of hope. He had sought CHRIST. He had found Him and been found of Him. Great was his reward; and his joy such as could not be taken away. He would have been greatly blessed, then, had no more been done for him. But did that CHRIST, Who bestows such honour on humility, Who so loves them that love Him and His, Who has made the best of His promises, yea, all of them to faith, did He, think you, give no further token, no higher blessedness to that centurion? Did He

not rather prove to him, that he had made a wise choice, that he had chosen the best kind of blessing, in asking for spiritual presence rather than bodily presence? Did He not manifest Himself to him, in that peculiar way of which the world knows, and can know nothing? Did He not go, He and the Father, and make spiritual and permanent abode with him? Yes, surely, this is all implied in the words, "Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee."

This view of the subject has its evident lessons and promises for us. Be it ours, brethren, to learn and practice the lessons, and doubt not but GOD will fulfil to us the promises.

In dismissing now the general subject, and attempting only to deduce practical instruction from the words of the text, I would ask you to notice first, the kind of answer which prayer gets; it is blessed in the way it asks to be blessed. When the elders besought our LORD that He would come and heal the servant, then we read, He went with them. When presently the centurion, through his friends, urges, "Speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed," then CHRIST stays His own progress, and sends on His grace. "Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee."

It is thus that prayer is generally answered: what we ask for, that we obtain. *Generally,* I say, yet not always; for our wise and good LORD, when, in our ignorance, we prefer a wrong or a foolish request, sends us rather what He knows us to need, than what we ask. A father does not give his beloved son stone for bread, nor a scorpion instead of a fish. And it may be, yea, it often is the case, that we ask GOD for what we think would support us, or be of some other benefit to us, when its bestowal would cause us to stumble, or, perhaps, crush our spiritual strength, or poison our spiritual life. And then, I say, of His wisdom and goodness, He sends us away *not empty*—oh, no! none ask of GOD and obtain not, if they ask with right feeling—but blessed in a different way from that we ventured to prescribe. This truth is worth a little more thought. There are many of you, brethren, I doubt not, who have again and again prayed to GOD (and very earnestly) to continue to you some blessing which you were in danger of losing, or to confer upon you something which you felt you wanted, and who yet were not answered according to the prayer. Perhaps, you were failing in business, or your influence was being diminished, or your health breaking down, or your child dying,

Well, you earnestly, humbly, with faith and strong tears deprecated the calamity again and again; but still it came upon you as though you had never prayed; or you asked to be lifted out of your poverty or your misery, to be endowed with wisdom, to be made influential; you loved, and prayed GOD to make you loved again; you struggled to get a situation which was just what you needed, you prayed continually that you might succeed. It was all without avail. "No answer came."

No answer came! Say not that, brethren. Assuredly, an answer did come, if you prayed aright. It may be that you did not get what you wanted, or keep what was departing; for GOD knew your choice was an unwise one, and therefore of His love would not grant it. But He gave you a compensation, and more than a compensation. Just as when CHRIST prayed that the cup of His last agony might pass from Him. GOD rather strengthened Him from heaven to endure the agony, and made it His way to glory —so, when you have deprecated, or besought, against the will of GOD choosing for you, He has enabled you to bear the calamity, to do without the thing coveted, and has made all to work for your good. What He does it may be you know

not now, but you shall know hereafter. And when in heaven's light you see that the continued or bestowed prosperity would have made you proud and ungodly, that power or influence (though you meant it not) would have been perverted by you to your ruin, that the child taken away, had it remained, would have destroyed itself, and been a curse to you, that the disappointment, and the toil, and the suffering, which you so prayed against, were just the things that planted and nurtured in you Christian graces, and worked out for your glory—oh! then you will see that GOD did answer your prayers, and you will bless him fervently for sending His own answer instead of the one you dictated.

Meantime, in the light of this hope, remember always to add to your prayers for specific blessings the holy proviso, "Nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt."

But I said that generally, whenever, that is, there is no harm to ourselves in what we ask, GOD gives us what we pray for; and I produced proofs, which might be multiplied manifold that it is so. "Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee." Surely this is worth a thought; not only, or chiefly, as showing us GOD'S marvellous condescension and the efficacy

of prayer, but as admonishing us that the height, the amount, the nature of our blessedness, depends upon ourselves, upon what we ask in prayer. What a solemn consideration is this! GOD sits upon His heavenly throne, with listening ear and outstretched hands; angels wait to waft our supplications to His presence, the Holy Spirit to make intercession for us, the blessed Son to present our cause and plead it! It only remains for us to ask. Whatever we ask, if we are faithful, if it is good, we shall receive. What we ask not, that we shall not receive. Think of that, brethren! Call to mind, as far as you can, what kind of prayers you have been wont to make. Review your past and present state. In anything are you spiritually unblessed? Have you only an inferior blessedness? Ah! have you not all that you prayed for? Lack you not just that, which you never faithfully sought? This life, and the things of this life, have been often in your thoughts, and in your prayers, for yourselves and for others. You have prayed that GOD would preserve you, that He would defend you from danger and gross temptation, that He would give you health, and comfort, and earthly blessing, that He would protect and prosper those you love. You have not prayed much for spiritual blessings, or you

have been content with supplicating inferior spiritual blessings. A clean heart, a renewed mind, lively faith, heavenly peace, joy in the Holy Ghost, —if these are not yours, do you not know why? It is because you never asked for them, or, at least, never asked with that appreciation, that earnestness which alone prevails with GOD. GOD is willing to give them. GOD has promised to give them. He stands ever ready to fulfil His promise. But, nevertheless, for these things he will be inquired of. The measure of the expressed desire is the measure of the supply. Nothing less, in most cases nothing different, and always nothing more, may you expect from GOD, than that which you ask. O let the knowledge of this truth kindle in you desires, and teach you words wherewith to approach GOD. Miss not His choicest gifts for want of asking. Prefer not for yourselves that which is earthy, and poor, and fleeting. Thrust not away—and you do thrust away, if you do not woo—perfect spiritual blessedness. When next you kneel before GOD, whenever henceforth you kneel before Him, remember that while He is the owner and ready-giver of all good gifts, it is yet only what you ask that you will receive of Him. As thou hast believed, so shall it be done unto thee.

But, secondly, it is faith we see which gives force to prayer. "As thou hast believed." "Whatsoever ye ask, believing, ye shall receive." "Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering." "Let not him that wavereth think that he shall receive anything of the LORD." GOD would have us wait on Him, with confidence in His sufficiency, with sure expectation that He will give what we ask. If we lack this confidence and this expectation; if we make formal, rather than eager and hopeful requests; if we have any misgivings as to the answer; if we secretly resolve what we will do, if there is no answer; if we wait not, and watch not, for the answer, then, brethren, we forfeit the blessing. GOD heareth not such—we virtually ask Him not to answer us. We mock Him with the idle form of prayer. O ye who ask GOD for guidance, at the same time questioning yourselves as to what ye shall do—ye that pray against temptation, and forthwith yield to it—ye that profess to cast care upon GOD, all the while being full of cares—ye that beseech Him to help you, yet go on helping yourselves—ye that pray, and live as though you had not prayed, that call upon GOD, but wait not for his answer—ye that are not certain, that feel not the certainty, and act not, or forbear from acting upon it, that what you ask

you shall obtain, be sure that you shall go empty away, and that because of your unbelief. It is hollow formalism, it is fearful trifling, it is blasphemous mockery, to ask without faith, without sure calculation upon receiving. You dare not treat an earthly friend so. You shall not, with impunity, treat GOD so! Ah! here is the explanation of unanswered prayer—prayer for that which is desirable and right—it was not offered in faith; the answer was not expelled, and relied on; the life did not manifest expectation and reliance! Would you indeed receive anything from GOD? Prefer your request, in full acknowledgment of GOD'S ability, in faithful trust in His performance of all that you ask according to His will, and show your faith by utter renunciation of all self-guidance and self-dependence, by patient waiting, by stedfast resistance of all that GOD forbids, and persevering pursuit of all that He commands. Impress this upon yourselves as the spirit of your prayer, and the rule of your lives. Make yourselves such as GOD hears. Cleanse yourselves by the power of His grace from sin, that you may be allowed to approach Him. Arm yourselves with the godly resolution that, come what will, you will serve the LORD; and seek, above all, His kingdom and the righteousness

thereof. Examine yourselves, your peculiar wants and difficulties, that you may inform your prayers, and make them pointed and particular, expressing what you need and desire. Then offer them, with felt unworthiness, with holy adoration, in the certain conviction that He hears you, that He can supply your need, that He will supply it; and take to yourselves such just consolation and assurance, and let your life manifest them, as if CHRIST, Who cannot lie and cannot fail, had audibly declared to you, "Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee."

SERMON XI.

CHRIST STILLING THE STORM.

ST. MATTHEW, VIII., 26.

And He saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then He arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm.

IT was after a day of laborious teaching, that our LORD to escape for a time from the crowds that thronged Him, to obtain rest and quiet, perhaps to exercise His ministry in other places, commanded the disciples to steer the ship, in which He had been teaching, across the sea of Galilee, and to convey Him to the other side. Immediately, it would appear, that they set out, He laid Himself down and fell asleep. Partaking of human nature in its infirmity, though not in its sin, He was worn out with labour, and absolutely required, yea, hastened to rest. He sunk into a deep sleep, then, as soon as He assumed the posture of repose. But anon, a storm arose. One of those squalls (which so often come down upon lakes surrounded

by mountains) suddenly filled the air with boisterous wind, and so upraised and agitated the waves, that they dashed over the ship, and threatened it with destruction. The disciples, many of whom were fishermen, and others accustomed to occupy their business upon or beside the water, must have been too familiar with storms to be easily frightened. The darkening clouds, the howling wind, the troubled water, would, of course, arouse them to energy, warning them that they were in danger, and requiring them to watch and labour to save themselves; and so we can well imagine them running hither and thither, with anxious looks, loosing or furling the sails, as might be necessary; avoiding quicksands, and rocks, and shallow places; lightening the ship of dangerous burthens; directing their course by the safest way, to the haven where they would be. But either they must have been sorry sailors, with coward hearts, which we are not willing to believe, or their courage must have been overcome by very unusual and imminent danger, ere they would have rushed to their Master, and cried to Him, in terror, "LORD, save us, we perish!" or, in rash reproach, "Carest thou not, that we perish?" Yes! I say, there must have been unusual and imminent danger,

and even something more—some supernatural portent—thus to strike with terror, thus to fill with despair.

However this may be, they cried unto the LORD, and the LORD heard them. He had slept calmly through the roar of the wind—yea, even while the waves washed over Him; but the cry of distress entered quickly into His ear, and He awoke to answer it. "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?" were His awakening words. This is not a rebuke for coming to Him; they had done right therein. He would presently prove it by the miracle He would work for them. Neither is it an assertion that there was no real danger, that they had been too easily alarmed: for an inspired Evangelist, St. Luke, writing long afterwards, in the light of what CHRIST now said and did, expressly states that the vessel was filled with water, and that they were in danger. No; it is an acknowledgment of the danger, but it is also a pledge that it should be averted, and it is a tender reproach for not being confident of deliverance. "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?" Am not I with you? Do not I know your wants? Have I not power and will to relieve them? Where is your faith, in the prophecies of what I have yet to do, that you suppose

I am now to perish? Where is the confidence which becomes my followers?—which others, with less knowledge and encouragement, less ground of hope, have so fully shown. "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me." Yea, though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him! Thus He reproves, and calms, and assures them in their trouble, and then He proceeds to deliver them out of it. "He arose"—we read—"and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm." It was a wondrous manifestation of His Majesty. It was a gracious condescension to infirmity. It was a proof, too palpable to be resisted, too marvellous to be forgotten, that He is able to keep, and that He will keep, in safety and in peace, those whose minds are staid on Him, who commit themselves to His keeping. Well may the disciples, in the awful stillness of that calm, have been filled as much with reverential fear as with admiration. "They feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?" They had witnessed several of His epiphanies: they had tasted of the water made wine; they had seen the leper cleansed; and had, at least, heard on reliable testimony, that

the centurion's servant was restored—yea, in the early evening of this very day, just before they left the shore, JESUS had been casting out evil spirits, with His word, and had healed all the sick that were brought to Him: but in their eyes (whether they were right or wrong concerns us not now) this was a greater miracle, greater in extent, greater in power, greater in the suddenness, the certainty (felt by themselves, remember, as no other had been) and the peace and joy of its effect. Much must it have informed their worship, much must it have increased their faith. Power did it give them to proclaim hereafter that they knew in whom they had believed, patience to endure for His sake, in His strength; peace in persecution, comfort in sorrow, hope amidst otherwise confounding terrors and dismay, that they had actually experienced CHRIST'S salvation from destruction; that the experience had been vouchsafed them as a pledge of His constant care; that they had been told, on its account, to trust—never henceforth to be fearful, and of little faith!

Of great importance, then, was that miracle of the Stilling of the Storm, if it meant no more, and accomplished no more than this: if it only showed, that on a large, as on a small scale, over

elements, as well as over diseases, on the sea no less than on the land, JESUS was "mighty to save"; if it only furnished the eye-witnesses of His ministry with a great instance of His gracious power; if it only prepared them for their life of storms and difficulties, and supported them in their dangers and distresses, and kept them faithful and joyful.

But, surely, it has more meaning, and more worth, than this.

First, it reveals to us, if I mistake not, a contention between spiritual powers (the Son of GOD on the one side, the Devil on the other), followed by a victory of the good, and a conspicuous defeat of the evil. That was no accidental raging of wind and waves, that was no operation of the GOD of providence using the elements to accomplish good purposes which was rebuked by the voice of the Son of GOD. Rebuke would be meaningless addressed to mere wind and wave: it would be blasphemous addressed to GOD. It is only when speaking to the Devil, to fevers and distempers, the effects of demoniacal possession, to Peter or others, prompted by Satan, speaking his words, doing his work, that CHRIST uses rebuke. Here then, surely, Satan was at work, and here he was confounded! The enemy of

souls had never ceased to watch and seek to destroy the Saviour. He had stirred up Herod against Him in His infancy. He had personally assailed Him in the wilderness. He was now using the elements, over which much power is often allowed him, as we see in Job's case, as his agents of evil. But with all his wisdom and perception, he knew not what was in JESUS. He thought once that he could as easily have made Him sceptical as he did Eve, "hath GOD said," "If Thou be the Son of Man." He thought now that while the Son of Man slept he was unconscious and powerless. And so in his folly he sought to wreck the vessel, and overwhelm Him whom it carried in the depths of the sea. Attempting this, he did but give occasion for an additional manifestation of CHRIST'S mission and power to destroy him and his works. On the shore, before He started, CHRIST had cast out devils. On the shore for which He was making He would again cast them out. On the sea He now meets them, and confounds them. O what a mighty, what a galling conquest! Satan had let loose all the powers of the winds, he had lashed the waves into utmost fury, the disciples were dismayed, the Saviour was asleep, the ship was sinking. "Only a few moments," doubtless, he

exultingly thought, "and there shall be a second destruction of man, the kingdom shall surely become mine, for there will be none to dispute it" —when, lo! the LORD arose, and, with a word, made him undo the work he had done. "Peace be still;" and the wind ceased, and there was a great calm! O signal defeat! O earnest of the promise that the head of the serpent shall be bruised, that Satan himself shall be bound and trodden under foot, and cast into the lake of fire, and shall deceive and vex no more. Surely, this is one of the chief scenes, one of the most mysterious and important events, one of the most glorious manifestations of CHRIST'S life on earth.

But this is not all its significance. The miracles of our LORD were acted parables—types of spiritual things—rather outward signs, not themselves to be given up, but thereafter to be accompanied by inward grace.

The ship on the sea of Galilee represents the Christian Church, or the individual member of it. The sea is the world; the storm, with its adverse wind and difficult waves, figures the trials, the buffettings, the persecutions, the fears of this mortal life; the disciples are the types of weak yet willing human nature—both our warnings and our examples; and CHRIST is Himself, yet, so to

speak, but a figure of the true, dwelling in His Church in each faithful member, often apparently unheeding, unconscious, yet always our sure defence and deliverer, prompt to hear when called upon, able to comfort, mighty to save.

That entry into the ship, and sailing forth into the sea, represents our first journey, and each renewed journey to CHRIST, in Baptism, in Confirmation, in Holy Communion, in every fresh repentance, every vow, every act of worship. Forth we go with Him. All is calm and hopeful. We seem to have to journey over quiet waters. The shore of Heaven is straight before us, and we are making for it. But, as soon as we set out, our envious, deadly enemy, hating our LORD, and hating us, plots our destruction, and assays its accomplishment. Soon trouble takes the place of peace, winds of adversity toss and try us, hope begins to pale, terror to dismay, the waters go even over our soul, and He who should calm us, and sustain and cheer us, seems to have fallen asleep, to help us not, to take no notice of us. It is the hour of GOD'S trial, of the Devil's temptation! What shall we do? If we are wise sailors, like as I have supposed the disciples to have done, we shall meet the occasion with well-directed energy; we shall keep the vessel away

from the quicksands of pleasure, the shallows of pride, the rocks of offence, and the whirlpools of sin. We shall cast out the weight that drags us down, sloth, indifference, besetting sin. We shall bear up against the boisterous winds of adversity. We shall resolutely and perseveringly pursue the straight course through the waters, making for, looking for the shore. Unless we do all this, we have no right to hope. But we must take care, lest in, ay, even by doing it, we lose our hope. Satan destroys many because they make no effort to save themselves; but he destroys quite as many because they rely on their own efforts. It is a fact that we can do nothing by ourselves; that human wisdom, self-reliant, is sure to be confounded, and human effort, independent, to be paralysed. But even if for the time we see what is right, and are successful in doing it, he will enshroud us in such horrible darkness, he will fill our ears with such dismal sounds, he will so toss and bewilder and overwhelm us, that presently weariness, perplexity, and despair will cause us to give up, to consent to our own destruction. The disciples in that storm-tossed ship seem to have been bringing themselves well nigh into this ruin, first to have relied on themselves, and then to have despaired of themselves, all the while forget-

ting Who was with them, Who should have been their guide, Who was their sure protector, when, all at once, before it was too late, they remembered and aroused Him, and called Him to their aid. It was their bliss to find that "the saint's extremity is GOD'S opportunity;" that it is never too late, before destruction, to call upon Him and be saved; but they were not allowed to enjoy this bliss unmixed with reproach for self-confidence and for want of confidence in Him. In all the storms and dangers which beset us on the sea of life, let us take example from the disciples to call upon Him who can save us, and let us also take warning from them, not to forget His company, or to suppose that He forgets us.

Such seems to be a sketch of the interpretation of the meaning and instruction for us of this acted parable.

And now, brethren, having learnt the general truth, let us pick out and dwell upon some of its particulars.

And first, in setting out with CHRIST, expect storms and dangers. We are too apt to suppose that the war of life is to be waged only with men, that the storms of life are only encountered in temporal things. We can well understand that it was otherwise, that it must have been otherwise,

with the first founders of the Church, with confessors in the face of unbelieving Jews and heathen Romans, with the Reformers, with missionaries now: but in our own case we calculate on a smooth and safe journey over the sea of time to the shore of eternity, ay, and after many days, experience, we say, confirms our calculation. No sore temptations try us; no conflict of good and evil principles tosses and tears us; no despair threatens to drown us. We have trouble enough in the world, in earning our daily bread, in claiming and maintaining our own, in becoming rich, or powerful, or famous, in ruling those who rebel against our just authority, who would gainsay our words, and frustrate our efforts. But in spiritual things this is not the case. We find it easy (I speak that which the manifest lives and apparent feelings of what are called respectable men justify my speaking) to follow the course which we would in religion—we worship in church, we read the Bible and pray at home without opposition. It costs us no trouble to keep the letter of God's chief commandments. We know nothing of spiritual wrestling, spiritual fear, spiritual despondency. Why should we? Our ways are mainly upright; our consciences not afraid, our duty plain and simple; and in Christ, therefore, our

hope sure. I know that men think this (at least they do not think otherwise), and in their lives they act it, even if they dare not shape it into words. But, brethren, if it is so with you, look to it, for the calm is more deadly than the storm. The Devil is the inveterate enemy and the untiring assailant of CHRIST and Christians. His whole being and energy are concentrated in the aim and effort to bury the ark of CHRIST in the sea of eternal destruction. If, then, you pass over that sea, and are enshrouded by no darkness, beaten by no winds, tossed by no billows, be sure that it is because CHRIST is not in your company. That Church has had its candlestick removed, which dwells in security, peaceful and prosperous; and that individual has not CHRIST for the tenant of his heart who experiences not what the storm-tossed vessel typified. Satan is intent upon destroying every one that is CHRIST'S. If he attempts not your destruction, it is because he does not consider you CHRIST'S — and, remember, though he is not all-wise, he is as an angel, and an archangel in perception—because your vessel bears not CHRIST; because you are on no journey with CHRIST to cast out evil spirits and drive them over steep places into the sea. O, my brethren, it is an awful sign, a death-boding dis-

tinction, when Satan lets us alone in this sea of life, and deems it unnecessary to keep us by violent efforts from reaching heaven. It is the expression of his informed and deliberate judgment that we are not going thither! O ye who dwell at ease and glide smoothly along the journey of life, put back, take CHRIST on board, and joy when you find in yourselves the signs of His presence, the assaults of Satan, the warring within you of good and evil, the stirrings of conscience, the flutterings of spiritual fear. I do not mean become morbid, and delight in what is mournful and terrible; but suspect and refuse the peace which Satan offers without contest, and determine to have only that which in CHRIST'S strength you win and maintain.

Next, consider the meaning of CHRIST'S lying asleep in the storm, and interfering not to control it, till so earnestly called up.

In providence and in grace GOD delights, so to speak, to hide Himself, though He exhibits the results of His works. He is the Author of every gift, and the Ruler and Promoter of its use; but He puts it into our hands as His agents, and bids us with it accomplish His will. As the heart is the fountain of the blood which flows through our members, as it is bone and muscle that give

strength to the arm, so is GOD the Source of grace to the soul, and the prevailing Power of our efforts. Still, it is not Himself prominently and foremost that does the work in the world, but we from and by Him. The explanation of this economy seems to be, first, that He would have us walk by faith—remembering Him, relying on Him, working for Him—rather than by right, constrained, whether we will or not, without feeling or desire, or dependence, to see, and admit, and feel His power. And, secondly, that He would give us an individuality, a certain dependent independence, which shall make us feel personal responsibility, and allow us to deserve (in a sense) the recompense of personal effort. Thus, He leaves the fool to say, There is no GOD, and rewards the faithful by revealing Himself to belief. Thus, while there is a GOD, while He is not far from us, while in Him we live and move and have our being, we are required and stimulated to seek Him, to feel after Him, and find Him. Besides, or more properly *therefore*, we have to call upon Him before He answers. Even when He had determined, and declared His determination, to bless the Israelites, He made the condition, "Nevertheless, for these things I will be inquired of." He would have us live by spiritual

dependence. He would have us communicate to Him our wants. He would have us draw down by prayer the supply. And this He effects by making it a law, that He will know nothing of us, at least know nothing so as to heed for our good, but what we tell Him, and will give us nothing but what we ask. I have so lately enlarged upon this subject that I will add nothing upon it now, but to bid you remember the necessity and the power of prayer.

Lastly, consider what is taught by that remonstrance, spoken in the interval between awaking and acting, "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?" I have already said that CHRIST did not disapprove the prayer, but only the fear which had preceded it, the poverty of the faith which accompanied it. Neither did He demand of the disciples the impossibility of being undisturbed in the midst of such perturbation. It is natural—natural even to the Christian full of grace, to be affected by the circumstances which attend him. CHRIST was so affected Himself, as His prayers, and shrinkings, and watchings, and open teaching assure us. He, who wept at human misery, though He was just going to put it to flight; He, who shrank from the trial which He had deliberately and of choice encountered, has sanctioned and recommended (shall I

say enforced?) by His example the same feelings in His disciples. He does not forbid us to be human, but only requires us to leaven humanity with godliness. Trials we are to have, and trials we ought to feel. To be stolid and callous is to be unchristian, for none ever felt trials as CHRIST did. But in our trials, while we feel, and weep, and shrink, we are not to be faint-hearted. We are to know in Whom we have believed. We are, therefore, to bear them, and submit to them; but we are not to be overpowered by them. We are not to allow them to exercise such an influence as to make us forget that there is One greater than the storm, Who rules it even in its wildest raging, Who will cause it to cease when it is fitting, Who will not allow it to overwhelm us if we are dependent on Him in its continuance, if we hope in Him to stay it. Terrible is the darkness of the sky, powerful is the violence of the wind, drenching are the waves, but the ship shall not sink, for CHRIST is in it. Whatever, then, the terrors and the trouble of the present, we have hope, we have confidence in the future. "Why art thou so cast down O my soul, and why art thou so disquieted within me? Hope in GOD for I shall yet praise Him, Who is the health of my countenance and my GOD."

Such is the teaching of CHRIST's remonstrance. And the time of its utterance, the delay to assuage the storm, teaches this further lesson, that in this life CHRIST will give us comfort in trouble, but not necessarily deliverance out of trouble. By and by He will indeed deliver us. But the best blessing here is not immunity, but trust and support. There is a peace in war, a joy in sorrow, a strength in weakness, with which the world and the Devil cannot intermeddle. Seek we this, and be sure we are wanting in what CHRIST delights to afford, if we have it not. But having it, bear we patiently, thankfully, all outward commotion, faithfully expecting the time, when openly, as already inwardly, CHRIST shall arise and command "Peace be still," and there shall be a great and abiding calm.

SERMON XII.

UNITY WITH PEACE.

EPHESIANS, IV., 1, 2, 3.

I, therefore, the prisoner of the LORD, *beseech you that ye walk worthy of the calling wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

IT was the prayer of our Blessed LORD—what an earnest prayer it was, delivered in what solemn and affecting circumstances—that all His disciples might be one, even as He and the Father were one. He had laboured to secure this oneness, by teaching them that there was the same truth for all to receive, and the same work for all to do. Individual fancies and theories were not to be indulged, where the whole teaching was of GOD; pride was not to exercise itself where everything was received, and nothing earned; ambition was checked, by being told that, by seeking, it

should lose, that he who would be first should be last. All were equal in position, all equal in privileges. In serving one another, in preferring one another—by this alone could they please GOD; in this way only could they reach unto eminence. Devoted to a common LORD, directed by a common revelation, enabled by a common grace, exercised in a common work, cheered by a common hope, surrounded with common trials and difficulties—what could there be within, without, past, present, or future, which should prevent them from all thinking the same thoughts and doing the same works, sinking the individual in the company, clinging to one another, labouring together, knit together in a holy bond—"One LORD, one faith, one baptism, one GOD and Father of all, Who is above all, and through all, and in all." To think for oneself, what was it but to reject GOD'S truth; to act independently, but to forsake their appointed work; not to serve and love the brethren, not to serve and love the LORD; to separate from the Christian company, to go away from CHRIST?

Even if the Spirit had not been given to effect this unity, if the Gospel had not enforced it by the plainest denunciation of heresies and schisms —*crimes* classed by it with the worst and lowest,

and most certain to exclude from heaven; even if CHRIST had never prayed for their union, nor taught them that they were to be united, still, if the disciples of religion were like the followers of any other cause, it might have been expected—it would have seemed morally impossible that it should be otherwise—that the remembrance and love of their Master, the cause which they had taken up, the knowledge of the way in which alone it could be furthered, their common relationship, and interests, and aims, and hopes, would have kept them in one body, would have bound them fast to each other in the bonds of peace. And, doubtless, it would have been so, but for the influence and machinations of the evil one. There could have been no other fruit from such seed, but that the enemy sowed tares in the same field. In CHRIST, self had been denied and destroyed. His Church was to be the embodiment and propagator of self-denial, self-submission, self-devotion. Such a Church threatened antichrist with certain destruction: for antichrist is the spirit of self—and selfishness destroyed, where would be sin? Therefore, the Devil sought to break up or mar and impair the Church; and, to accomplish his object, infused into as many of its members as he could, the very spirit of self,

which it was commissioned to destroy. Alas! he was too successful in his fell work. Soon self began to ask, "Why should I not choose what to believe—what to do? Why should I not make to myself a name, and claim for myself authority, and power, and reverence? Why should I not have private views, and seek private ends? Why should I suffer, and forbear, and seek another's good, rather than my own?" The selfish question was father to the selfish determination; and so, even in the Apostles' time, the faith was mutilated here and denied there—there were heresies, and schisms, and strifes, and boastings of spiritual gifts, and withholding of temporal substancefro m God, and indulgence of lusts, and hatings, and revengings, and backbitings, and fightings, and denying of one another, among those who were all called with one calling, enlightened and sanctified by one Spirit, appointed to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." And so it has continued to the present time. There is no such reasoning, and questioning, and quibbling. and deciding for oneself what to believe, about any other subject, as about the truth, which God has plainly taught and has clearly defined. There are no other divisions so numerous, so *lamentable*, so strife-begotten, and strife-engen-

dering, as in the one body of CHRIST. Pride, and ambition, and self-seeking, in all its worst forms; evil suspicions, revilings, hatred, persecutions, have abounded, and do abound, and boldly manifest themselves in that very community whence self was to be expelled! Many antichrists are in the world, but as many in the Church. The very heathen repel our attempts to convert them, by bidding us first agree what to believe ourselves. The worst of men say they have a right to despise us for our bitter jealousies and disliking of one another; and the taunt is common, and has been in some measure provoked, that religion is only a mask, a cloak to hide men's basest passions and worst deeds.

It may be urged—it ought to be urged—that this is not altogether the fault of Christians. It was the will of GOD that the goats should be allowed to mingle with the sheep, that the tares should not be rooted out from among the wheat, that the net should contain small as well as great, worthless as well as good fishes. Hence they are "not all Israel, who are of Israel." And so the bad feelings and deeds, the things which are an offence and a reproach in Christendom, are to be charged not altogether to CHRIST'S true followers, but to those who only in name are

Christians—to the world, in fact, intruding into, and mixing itself up with, the Church.

Yes; this is so. The world has sought and found scope in the Church for the wild exercise of its reason, for profane speculations, and whimsical fancies; for self-indulgence, too, in all its forms; for lusts, and strifes, and false accusations, and enmities, and wickedness, of every hue and measure. The worst heretics and schismatics, the fiercest persecutors, the bitterest accusers of the brethren, are evidently not true followers, even in intention, of CHRIST; they are not rebels and traitors, "they are not of us," they belong to the enemy, and have stolen into our camp; and are now mixing themselves with us, and confounding, and harassing, and misguiding us, as part of the subtle warfare which is being waged by Satan against us. But still, alas! we are not clear. Too many who deserve to be called something better than nominal Christians, too many—ay, even of the best of us—make no endeavour—that is worthy of the name—to keep the unity of the Spirit; or, if they strive for unity, forget the bond of peace.

It is very common to find a man who has been at much pains to find out for himself the doctrines and requirements of Christianity, who heartily

accepts every article of the creed, who is scrupulously exact in keeping all the ordinances, who would think himself guilty of no ordinary sin, if he frequented the place of worship of another sect, or contributed of his substance to their cause, who is yet all the while utterly indifferent to the fact that almost every article of his creed, and every ordinance of his Church, is ignored, and even denounced by some one or other of the many bodies of men calling themselves Christian communities. He thinks it no business of his to defend the faith, or to vindicate the ordinances. Let every man look to himself, is his maxim, and leave others alone; or, perhaps, if he is momentarily interested in the matter, if a wish springs up that it were otherwise, he soothes himself, and spares himself further anxiety and labour, by suggesting that Christian charity would not interfere with another's liberty. "These others," he reasons, "have a religion, and follow it. It is not altogether the same as mine, but it is in many respects like it, perhaps in all essentials. At any rate, it is better than none; it would be presumptuous to suppose that they may not be saved by it. Therefore, if I must help in proselytizing any, it shall not be these mainly right, but the godless, the followers of no religion!"

Now, brethren, such a man is utterly in fault: he is incurring the Apostle's reproach of being carnal, in allowing divisions; he is offending against the very Christian charity which he thinks he is exercising; he is unconcerned about the due honour of God; he is disobeying the injunction to endeavour "to keep the unity of the Spirit." The question is not, whether a man can be saved in heresy or schism, but whether any Christian, who honours God and loves the brethren, ought to wink at heresy or schism? And the answer is plain—he ought not! Is God honoured, is He pleased, when the creature, to whom He reveals Himself, says, in effect, Thus much of the Divine account I will accept; the rest I do not like, cannot reconcile with my private pre-conceived notions, cannot see to be reasonable, therefore, I reject it? Is God obeyed, when His servant, instead of fulfilling His whole will, sets aside capriciously, or for some selfish reason, certain positive precepts of that will? Is any Christian in a certainly accepted and safe state, or in the way to it, who does not use, who ignores the need of, prescribed means of cleansing and sanctifying? And if he is not, how far is it charitable, to let him remain as he is, without concern? My brethren, we all recognise it as the

duty of every Christian to promote the knowledge and acceptance of the truth. Can we be said to discharge this duty, if we care not about the mutilation or distortion of the truth? We all acknowledge that we ought to love one another, to have fervent charity among ourselves. Is it charitable—is it not culpably selfish—to have, as we believe, the best, if not the only, right faith—and not to be concerned that others have it not? Is it not, too, strangely perverse to admit, that those in separation are brethren, fellow-pilgrims, fellow-heirs, to hope to meet them in heaven, and to think, and feel, and live in perfect harmony with them for ever; and yet here not to be concerned that we never can give them the right hand of fellowship—cannot journey with them, and help, and make for the inheritance together—can never even meet them in prayer and communion—must let them be as utter strangers? In earthly matters none of this would be tolerated, could possibly be. Why, then, can it be—why is it in religion? Because we are not jealous enough for the honour of God, because we do not truly love the brethren, because we do not endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit!

But it is possible to err—there are many who do err—on the other side; who, in their zeal for

the faith, insist that all shall think and do precisely as they do, or shall forego the name of brethren: who have been at no pains to search out the ground of their own faith, and see how much of it is derived from GOD, and how much from man; who make no distinction between important and unimportant misconceptions; who class together the wilful teacher of error and the misguided learner, the originators of schism and the inheritors of it; who blame for their faults those whom they should rather pity for their misfortune; who would make the path of orthodoxy as narrow as possible, and excommunicate all whom they could detect treading on its borders; who not only see nothing right beyond their own Church, but are impatient of much that is within it; who split the Church up into parties, and bring about the worst of schisms—divisions, misgivings, and oppositions, among members of the same household, continuing in the same house; who would have undue prominence given to certain doctrines; who fight for or against certain ceremonies and vestments, and certain kinds of music; who are ever looking for something to protest against, to blame, or to pity, in their fellow-worshippers or their ministers. These men think that they do GOD service (for I speak

not now of the wilful); they are intent upon serving Him; but it is like Saul before his conversion, with an ignorant and persecuting zeal. They want to establish and keep, what they think, the unity of the Spirit, but they care not for the bond of peace. If a member of their own communion does not think as they do, they quarrel with him, they bid him go, they would thrust him out: while, as for members of other Christian bodies, they think worse of them, they speak worse of them, they shun them more than they would an infidel or a reprobate! Let not this be thought exaggeration; not always, nor very often, let us hope, do they come to this growth; but of this kind, alas! too nearly of this measure there are not a few among both High Churchmen and Low Churchmen; and in this direction works all zeal that is not fully enlightened by GOD, that is not warmed with love for CHRIST, and love for those whom CHRIST died to save and win. Zeal is good, earnest contention for the faith is imperatively required of every Christian, but so is right knowledge and love. Right knowledge, I venture to say, while condemning actual heresy and schism, would often be content with creeds in general terms, and would make much easier, than many strict religionists conceive, the terms of commu-

nion, so as to include as many as were really desirous of being included; and love, Christian love, would sigh and sorrow over differences, and yearn after separatists; and would labour, and persuade, and spend, and be spent, and wrestle in prayer, to cement, to convert, to bring in. O it is *self* that is so stern and strict in defining what is correct theology; it is antichrist in his worst mood, that would thrust out or cut off a brother sinner!

My brethren, understand clearly that you are most solemnly bound to accept yourselves, and to urge upon others, the whole teaching of GOD, nothing less and nothing more; to render yourselves, to persuade others to render, precise and perfect obedience. You may not be indifferent about others, but you must not be overbearing. You are keepers and helpers of the brethren, but you are not judges and avengers. It is your duty to honour GOD, and to maintain His honour; it is your mission to persuade others to honour Him also. GOD is honoured in unity, in agreement, in faith, in union, in practice, and service, and worship. You have then to promote this unity; but, as a pre-qualification, you must have so entered into the mind of the Spirit, as to know —specially for GOD'S missionary work—what

liberty is allowed, and to feel, after your poor measure, what CHRIST feels of love for each individual soul. In the prosecution of your work, the text directs you—You are called with one calling, the Gentile is included with the Jew; the aim is union, not separation, that all may be saved. By all means, save whom you can. Be lowly, let not self intrude, where CHRIST should be put forward; be meek, let not self recoil where CHRIST would suffer; be patient, enduring, long-suffering, slow to take offence, determined not to give offence, bent upon returning good for evil, forbearing one another in love, making every allowance for wrong training, for natural prejudices, for individual infirmities—ay, and even perversities. Be very zealous for the unity of the Spirit; but be sure that you are breaking, not promoting, that unity, wherever you sever or endanger the bond of peace. Follow this advice —and I do not say you will root out heresy, and heal divisions, but you will do much towards it. Argument, and censure, and ridicule, and remonstrance, and denunciation, and persecution, have been trying, ever since the Christian era, to establish the unity of the Spirit, and have rather destroyed it. Try you, whether he was not enlightened and sanctified by the Spirit, who said,

and acted upon it, "that one ounce of love could do more than many pounds of controversy." Men may be repelled from you, by your orthodoxy, your zeal, your reasoning, your stout remonstrance. They will be subdued by your forbearance, and will come after you for your love!

To the best of you, I say, there is some indifference which you ought to shake off. To the best of you, I say, get farther from bigotry and the spirit of self.

SERMON XIII.

THE LAW IN THE GOSPEL.

ST. LUKE, X., 25.

What shall I do to inherit eternal life?

WE have here the question of a Jewish lawyer, who is said, in propounding it, to have tempted our LORD. This does not necessarily, or even probably, mean, that his object was simply to ensnare and entangle JESUS in his speech: but rather that he was putting Him to the test, that he might judge of the qualifications and orthodoxy of the New Teacher. But, besides this, he seems, from the commendation presently passed on him, to have had a better motive; to have been like the scribe who was not far from the kingdom of heaven, to have felt personal anxiety about salvation, and to have sought from our LORD, in an honest, though somewhat professional and self-sufficient manner, the resolution of a real doubt.

"What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He had listened to the words in which JESUS reminded His hearers, that they had greater privileges than those who lived before them ("Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see. For I tell you that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them, and to hear those things which ye hear and have not heard them"), and rightly concluding that they were an announcement of the arrival of Gospel times, and the setting forth of their speaker as the Great Gospel Teacher, he asked, what was there *new* for him to hear and learn, and what consequently remained for him to do, that he might inherit eternal life. The reply of our LORD is remarkable. "What is written in the law? how readest thou?" There is nothing new, nothing taken away, nothing added or altered. I come, to fulfil the ceremonial law, to enforce the moral law, what does that bind upon thee? And he answering said, with much wisdom —much spiritual discernment, "Thou shalt love the LORD thy GOD with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind: and thy neighbour as thyself. And JESUS said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live:" *i. e.*, shalt have

eternal life. Observe, throughout this lawyer's speech, how correct is his theology. "What shall I do to *inherit* eternal life?" not to gain, to purchase, to earn it, but to inherit it. "I do not claim it as a profitable servant, I am not so foolish as to suppose that I can procure it by any surrender, or exchange, or labour. It comes (to those to whom it comes at all) as an inheritance, to the children of the covenant, the heirs of faithful Abraham. And this heirship is not a natural, but a spiritual one. I am a Jew outwardly, but I do not therefore claim to be certainly a Jew inwardly. They are not all Israel who are of Israel. Abraham's child according to the flesh, I would also be, what I am not necessarily, what indeed I am not at all of mere natural birthright, Abraham's child according to the promise." And next observe, how he seeks to secure the inheritance. "What shall I *do?*" Eternal life is not the reward of service, it is not the fruit of labour, it is the privilege of a spiritual relationship; but still it cannot be enjoyed by those who are indifferent about it, or by those who only desire it. It must be laid hold on by real active efforts; it must be maintained by a particular course of conduct; salvation must be worked out. "What must I do" to secure it? Truly he is an

enlightened scribe! He knows that eternal life is the free gift of a GOD, Who is no respecter of persons; Who recognises no birthright, no personal merits; Who will have mercy on Whom He will have mercy: but that yet grace does not fall, as the rain from heaven, alike upon the barren and the fertile, the thankless and the thankful, the careless and the anxious, the indolent and the active; but is ever guided by a discerning and distinguishing hand, is ever bestowed upon righteousness. And so he asks, What is the righteousness that inherits grace: knowing well what was the prescribed righteousness of the law, how men were to be saved in times past; but expecting that under the Gospel, an additional, perhaps a different course was to be followed.

We have already seen that CHRIST referred him back to the law, as revealing and enacting all that was necessary. "What is written in the law? How readest shou?" It is in his answer to this question that we see chiefly the perfection of his religious theory and his great intellectual superiority to the scribes generally. For, observe, he does not reply "We must be circumcised; we must be sprinkled with the blood of goats and heifers; we must keep the Passover; we must wait on the temple-services; we must give tithes

of all that we possess." Nor, again, does he say, "We must observe all moral precepts; we must refrain from all idolatry; we must do justice and love mercy; obeying implicitly the commandments of the two tables." No! in theory he is wiser than that: he has no reliance on external rights and ceremonies: he is sure that GOD demands something better than a servile conformity with certain precepts and restrictions. GOD, he knows, looks to the heart, requires the spirit rather than, *i. e.*, beyond the letter. The law has taught him this: Moses gave him from heaven ceremonies to perform, and moral commandments to keep; but Moses told him, that mere outward conformity with these things was not righteousness; that the law was spiritual; that the acts done and refrained from under it were only exhibitions of a principle which must reign within: "Thou shalt love the LORD thy GOD with all thy heart and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbour as thyself." Even so. "Thou hast answered right," said CHRIST. "Thou hast learnt under the law, all that the Gospel would teach. To exhibit this is the bent of My life on earth, to enforce it will be the mission of My Church. Love is the fulfilling of the law. This do, and *thou shalt live.*"

It appears to me, brethren, that in this conversation, carefully considered, we may find a clue to the satisfactory interpretation of those perplexing sayings about the differences between the law and the Gospel: "The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life." "Ye are not under the law;" "the ministration of condemnation;" "The covenant that was confirmed before of GOD in CHRIST, the law which was 430 years after cannot disannul." "The Law and the Prophets were until John." "I am not come to destroy the law." "This do and thou shalt live."

It is a common notion that there is an essential difference, amounting even to a contradiction between the law and the Gospel. GOD is supposed —as if He were an imperfect Being changing His ways capriciously—to have suspended the Covenant of Grace which He had made with Abraham, from the time of Moses to that of CHRIST, and to have given the Jews in its stead a Covenant of Works, which He well knew they could not keep, and under which, therefore, they were sure to be destroyed: or, if He accepted any of them under the law, then, it is said, that inasmuch as their obedience was of course imperfect, He must have been content with less than He had required, and have disregarded His own

decree, "The soul that sinneth it shall die." Nay, more than this: that He dispensed for a time with the merits of CHRIST's atonement and the finding of salvation through Him, and dealt with man on his own merits, and rewarded him for an imperfect obedience. But now, it is urged, all this is once more changed. The law, having served its purpose of showing men that they could not obey GOD in the letter, having concluded them all under sin by disallowing the things they were prone to, and requiring what they could not do, having disappointed and balked them in their efforts to obtain salvation by it, and so caused them to abandon its observance in despair, and to inquire for another way of salvation—thus being a schoolmaster to lead them to CHRIST—has now been wholly repealed; so that we have nothing more to do with it, being brought out of bondage into liberty, and what we find forbidden or required by it, is not forbidden or required by us *because it is in the law*, but may be done or left undone, notwithstanding what the law says, unless some eternally moral principle, independent of Jewish sanctions and restrictions, would be thereby violated! I have put this in plainer and stronger words than any of yourselves probably would use, or are accustomed to hear: but I have not exag-

gerated the matter. In proof, let me ask, Are there not many who think the rehearsal of the Decalogue out of place in the Communion service? who object to moral preaching as savouring of the obsolete law? who talk about the "filthy rags" of their own righteousness, as if they were something wrong in keeping in the law? who believe that CHRIST is glorified most when they do least? who boast of a liberty to use or use not ordinances and means of grace? who reproach others with being, for instance, Sabbatarians? who speak of the GOD of the New Testament almost as if the GOD of the Old Testament were another Being, of different attributes, enacting different laws? And even among those who have not distinctly set the law and the Gospel in opposition, is there not a vague notion that somehow the Old Testament does not concern us Christians, and that our way of salvation is different from that of the Jews, and much easier to follow? O how do such persons reconcile with their notions CHRIST'S teaching of the lawyer, whom He not only told to look for the way of salvation in the law, but commended for finding it there, and enjoined to keep it as the condition of salvation: "This do, and thou shalt live."

The fact is, the way of salvation has always

been the same, since man became a sinner. Eternal life has always been a free gift in CHRIST. Not for their merits or deservings does GOD love men; not by their own inventions or labours do they procure acceptance. The precious blood of CHRIST shed (in effect) before the foundation of the world, has ever been the fountain for sin; the intercession of CHRIST has ever been the means of reconciliation; the grace of CHRIST'S sanctified human nature applied by the Holy Spirit has ever been the leaven of regeneration, of conversion, of perfection in holiness and fitness for the inheritance of the saints in light. But GOD has never been indifferent to the way in which men receive His free gifts. He at first created man for His own glory, and He has redeemed, and would sanctify him for His glory. He made man to love Him, to depend on Him, to render Him the grateful homage of a free-will service, to reflect His own glorious attributes of holiness and love. The sin of Adam and Eve was not that they ate of a particular fruit reserved from them, but that they frustrated the end for which they were created; that they found not their delight in the way of GOD'S will; that they chose for themselves out of Him; that they doubted His truth, gave themselves over to the influence and domi-

nion of another lord. They would have sinned as greatly, as hatefully, had they scrupulously refrained from the deed of sin, but in their hearts longed after it, and in their hearts murmured against the restriction, and disputed the importance or the justice of it. And so the holiness of pardoned man does not consist in the mere mechanical, servile, or selfish rendering of outward obedience, in the number of enjoined things which he does, and the number of forbidden things which he avoids; but in the inward love and gratitude which he feels towards God, in his filial reverence of his Heavenly Father, in his delight to carry out God's known will, and his anxiety to learn more, that he may do more of it, in his heart's beating, so to speak, in unison with God's heart, and his life's reflecting God's light and love.

To bring men to this state, that He may delight in them, that they may glorify Him in all things, is the purpose and aim of God's great scheme of salvation; and, to forward that scheme, is, and has been, the object of all His dealings with men of all times (when they have not been judgments of wrath, because mercy was refused), whether they have been encouragements or remonstrances, pleadings or rebukes, blessings or chastisements, the promulgations of moral laws, the laying on or

taking off of positive or ceremonial commandments. None of these things could in themselves have made men what GOD willed them to be, loving children of a loving Father; yet they had, or were designed to have, their effect in bringing them back little by little to a right mind, and a right life. But being used by a wise and discerning GOD, though their object was always uniform, the use of them has varied, one being employed in this case, another in that, according to the state of those on whom they were to operate. Thus Adam, fresh from the hand of GOD, full of knowledge and intelligence, and holiness and love, was left, it would appear—but with one commandment, the test of his integrity—to worship and glorify GOD as his own heart and mind dictated; while the Jews, coming out of Egypt, sunk in ignorance, given to idolatry, perverse in will and affections, were dealt with as babes, albut without mind and without heart. To them it was necessary to declare, that there was but one GOD, to command them to worship Him, to prescribe every particular of the worship, to bid them not blaspheme Him, to hedge them in by numerous restrictions, to write down every item of their duty, to encourage their obedience by immediate rewards, to check their transgressions by instant

punishments! They were treated, in fact, just as wise and fond parents treat little children: their minds taught by pictures—brazen serpents, pillars of light and fire, gorgeous tabernacles, sacrifices of bulls, and goats, and lambs, burnings of incense, and the like—and their hearts and lives trained by a course of discipline suited to their comprehension, and a system of rewards and punishments which they could appeciate. These things were means to an end. They impressed upon the Jews, that reverence and obedience were due to GOD. They taught them to look to Him for reward and punishment, to love and fear Him. But like the arbitrary discipline we use with children, and the toys which we give or take away from them according to their conduct, they were to be set aside (as far as they were childish) so soon as more intelligent and better influences could be employed, and the children be taught to use their minds and hearts, in exercising reverence, and love, and fear, not in little observances and restrictions, not in mere literal compliance with some particular expressed laws, but according to the principle of love which would devote itself entirely, and which uses all its powers to find out what is devotion, and to practice it.

Thus, I say, the Jews were dealt with from

Moses to CHRIST, and then men were bidden to put away childish things—the Spirit being given to raise them above childishness—and henceforth to render enlarged, enlightened, loving service to GOD. They were not released from reverence and submission: very few commandments hitherto observed were repealed, save those that were typical and ceremonial, and which, of course, gave way to the antitype and to the new ritual of Christianity; but henceforth, they were told, GOD would not be pleased with mere literal obedience: Do what you did before, but do it in the spirit, and carry it farther, and search about to see whether your own hearts and minds cannot regulate your lives in things not prescribed.

Indeed, all this had been told them before, as the quotation of the lawyer from Deuteronomy alone would suffice to show; but it was not so strictly required of them as it is of us, because allowance was made for their childish want of spiritual comprehension, and because the perfection of obedience was postponed till the full strength was given to render it, as well as the enlightened mind to understand it.

In Gospel times the law is spiritualised, the observance of the commandments is extended beyond the outward life, to the very thoughts and

desires. To covet is to steal, to lust is to commit adultery, to hate is to murder! Hence, while in one sense, our obedience is easier, because we render it under the influence of enlightened minds and kindled feelings, of love and gratitude—whereas, the Jew was perpetually crossing and driving himself to keep a law which had no other recommendation to him than that its observance preserved him from immediate chastisement—in other respects, our obedience is not only more imperatively necessary, because our privileges and responsibilities are greater, but it must be more precise, because any wilful deviation from it—in us who are of a mature and enlightened age—will surely indicate an unloving heart; and he that has no love has no spiritual life!

This, after all, is the distinction between the good works of the Jew and those of the Christian; not that the former sought salvation on account of them, while the latter makes them but the tribute of praise and love for salvation—for the Jew believed that he was saved by ordinances, not by works—but that the Jew's was the enforced obedience of slavish fear, while the Christian's is the spontaneous expression of filial love. If the Christian were perfect in moral perception, he would be a law to himself, and would need but

little of a written law; but not being thus perfect, he finds his greatest help to glorify GOD, in the studying and following of the Mosaic laws, which are samples and specimens furnished by GOD, of acceptable works, and which, moreover, are a standard whereby he may measure, not so much how near, as how far he is, from doing the whole will of GOD.

This purpose, then, the law serves to Christians: it points out the ways in which love should exercise itself; and so, by confronting the negligent or transgressing, proves to them the absence or the imperfection of their love. The Christian is not free from the observance of one jot or one tittle of it, though he is no longer under the law, but under grace; but even if he has kept it all, he is not necessarily accepted: he has not rendered service pleasing to GOD, if his will is not better than his power, his heart larger than his deeds! This the lawyer knew theoretically; and yet, against his knowledge, he sinned. When asked what the law required him to do, he answered rightly, that the law required, above and beyond particular deeds, an impelling principle of love for GOD, and, for His sake, for man also. But then, when his answer was commended, we are told that he, willing to justify himself (which

means, either to excuse himself for past imperfection, or to attain presently unto the condition of the just, without becoming all that was required of him) demanded, "And who is my neighbour?" showing thereby, how much his heart was behind his mind; betraying the fact, that while he professed entire devotion to God, he was really trying to find out with how stinted and formal an obedience, he could win and keep his favour.

In review of this history, let me suggest to you, in very few words, some important truths.

"What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" is a momentous question for each of you to ask of God, through His revealed word. For the inheritance never shall be yours, unless you observe the conditions upon which it was promised; and one of those conditions (a most important one), is, that you should pursue constantly a course of righteousness, both to glorify God by prescribed service, and to acquire by spiritual exercise the necessary character for heaven, without which none can enter it.

To do righteousness—not simply to feel, or think, or speak righteously—is what is plainly enjoined upon you. Still, you must remember that you are not to propose to yourselves, as the approved course, the observance only of particular

laws, the confining of religion to special times, and places, and objects, and deeds; the mere walking in a clearly marked out path, as though hands, and feet, and ears, and lips, without heart or mind, could work out salvation; as though, too, it were not practicable or desirable, that you should offer unto GOD any free-will service, something besides what He has asked you to do! Above all, having come to understand, that while the fruit of religion is in the life, the germ of it is in the heart; that without faith, and hope, and love, it is impossible to please GOD; that the law to you is spiritualised; that you are brought out of the bondage of servants into the glorious liberty of sons; that not the mere letter of the law, but the spirit of it is to be your guide; that outward deeds are not of themselves acceptable to GOD, but only as signs of enlightened hearty feeling—things done in faith and love; that worship in the temple is nothing, unless you worship out of the temple likewise; that bowing the knee, and praising with the lips, are an abomination, unless the spirit, too, is bowed and the soul upraised; that bodily sacrifice alone is no sacrifice, that it needs the broken and contrite heart, and the devoted spirit—while understanding, I say, all this, and rejoicing in the

reasonable, heart-sprung, spiritual service of the Christian, beware lest you separate what GOD has joined, or substitute free-will for commanded service, using your liberty otherwise than as servants of GOD; carrying out, as you suppose, the spirit of the law wholly in your own way, instead of keeping, while you spiritualise the letter of the law. "The time is come when, neither in Jerusalem nor in this mountain, shall ye worship the Father," does not mean that appointed places of worship shall not be resorted to, but that, besides, GOD shall be worshipped everywhere. A yearly celebration of the Passover is no longer necessary; but a continual feast is substituted for it. GOD seeks now to be worshipped in spirit and truth—that is, not without the body, but in addition to the body, with the spirit. The letter by itself killeth, because it is formal, and leaves the noblest powers and feelings of man unengaged for GOD; but the letter, as the carrying out of the Spirit, is still so imperative, so vital, that he who does not observe it foregoes the promise, "This do, and thou shalt live!"

SERMON XIV.

PRESENT SALVATION.

II. CORINTHIANS, VI., 2.

Behold, now is the day of salvation.

ST. PAUL, having just quoted a prophecy of Isaiah, which relates to an accepted time and a day of salvation, in the text declares the fulfilment of that prophecy: "Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation." That which was then promised, is now performed; that which was formerly but anticipated, and only embraced by faith, while yet afar off, is now realised and brought near. But the prophecy itself was mentioned by the Apostle, to enforce an entreaty, "We then as workers together with Him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of GOD. For He saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee." It is evident, then, that

St. Paul would impress upon the Corinthians that men are in danger of receiving the grace of GOD in vain, of not benefitting by all the merciful and bountiful provision made through CHRIST for their redemption, and justification, and sanctification, by not recognising that this is the day of salvation, and so, not looking and preparing for, and receiving a present salvation.

Salvation is, as you know, the result—possible in all cases; certain, wherever the conditions are observed—of redemption by CHRIST. In its perfection, it is absolute freedom from the guilt, the taint, and the power of sin, and complete, effectual, and abiding holiness of heart and life. It belongs not to our proposed subject to consider at any length the destruction from which this is a salvation, nor the manner in which it was wrought out for lost sinners by CHRIST, nor the blessedness of its perfect possession and fruition, which can only be had in heaven. We have rather to do with what is present, than with the past and the future. We inquire not now, What has CHRIST done, or, What shall we reach by and by, but, What ought we to do now? What have we, or may we have now? In what respects, to what extent, is salvation a thing of the present?

First, then, it is present in the offer to bestow

it, and the exhortations and influences to lay hold on it. When CHRIST rose victorious from the tomb, having paid the ransom for all the prisoners of the law, and purchased the right and power of being their Saviour, He did not immediately make all the men of His time actual partakers of the privileges, nor did He provide that all who should thereafter be born, should from their birth inherit the blessing, as from Adam they had inherited the curse. No man might say, "CHRIST has died and risen again, therefore, I am certainly saved, without any reserve or delay on His part, without any effort, almost without any desire, on my part." Salvation was then provided; rather, the fountain was then opened, and began to flow; but each man in his turn, at the call of GOD, and in the way of GOD'S appointment, was, so to speak, to help himself to salvation. In other words, what CHRIST did, was not to take all who were then living into an ark, and to cause all that sprung from them to be born and brought up in that ark; but simply to build an ark, and leave it open for all ages, and to offer helps to reach it, and to urge an entrance into it upon all men, by the entreaties and promises of His love, and the threats of His wrath.

We want to be impressed with this. We are

too apt to look upon salvation as an accomplished fact, belonging to the past; to speak of the blessedness of being born after the atonement has been made; to take for granted that we are actually saved, rather than that we have a present offer of salvation; and even to regard the ordinances of religion, as Baptism and Holy Communion, more as ceremonies of thankful faith, acknowledgments of obligation for past favours, than as means of laying hold on a now offered, and, as yet, unattained blessing.

Think a moment, brethren: look into your ways and thoughts about religion, and you will, perhaps, find that it is so with you; that, whatever may be your theory, your practice does not assent to the truth, that "Now is the day of salvation"; that you have now to be saved, yet to be washed from sin, to have its power destroyed in you, to be qualified for salvation, to lay hold on it, to work it out with fear and trembling, as that which, though commenced, is not certain to be completed—which, even when got, may again be lost. It may occur to you, as an objection to this statement, that you use means of grace, and somewhat diligently; that you exercise yourselves in prayer, and by Christian discipline; that you depend continually upon the ever-present grace of

GOD; that you count not yourselves to have attained; that you seek to go on unto perfection. All this may be true, and yet—I beseech you ask yourselves whether it is not so with you—the latent feeling may be, that salvation is a thing inherited, already, in a measure, attained; and that what religion requires of you, and what you render, is gratitude to the Giver, and a due appreciation of the gift, sought to be testified and developed by a becoming life, and an enlarging of the spiritual faculties, which by and by will have so much more to exercise themselves upon.

But, secondly, is not this, it may be urged, a right view and feeling? Is not this what the ministers of religion should labour to impress upon the baptized: that they have received salvation—the grace of GOD, which bringeth salvation? Are we not taught by the Church, and by the Bible, that in baptism we were born again, that we then became children of GOD—and if children, then heirs, joint heirs with CHRIST; that we are, therefore, from that new birth as actually the inheritors of a blessing, as naturally we were inheritors of a curse; and that, thenceforth, it is proper for us to say, "I heartily thank my Heavenly Father that he hath called me to this state of salvation through JESUS CHRIST"? It is even

so, brethren. "Now is the day of salvation," may mean to us Christians, "now we *have* salvation," rather than "now it is only offered to us." It may be intended to stir us up to a consideration of our high calling, to an appreciation of the great gift already bestowed, to a remembrance of what GOD has already done for us, to a sense of His abiding presence. There is no doubt—whether this text teaches it or no is another question—that the disciples of CHRIST have a present possession, as well as a present offer of salvation; and what I meant in the first part, was not to hide this truth, but to guard against the error, to correct whatever amount you might have of the feeling, that we have already a final gift, so complete that nothing can be added to it, so altogether of the past, that we can do nothing in the present, but acknowledge the goodness of GOD in bestowing it, and wait on Him patiently and holily till He is pleased to reveal to us the full excellencies of the gift, and to enable us to enjoy them in the eternal heaven. Above all, I meant to protest against, to awaken from the fearful delusion, that CHRIST has conferred absolutely on mankind, or upon any chosen number—the elect—the salvation which, by His precious merits, He procured; that it is ours independently

of means of grace, without closing with present offers of it, and making present exertions, and showing present appreciation of it; that it can be ours at all, without earnest seeking and praying for it, and strivings, and workings, and self-denials, and crucifyings of evil, and growth in grace, and perseverance unto the end. "By grace are ye saved, and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of GOD." Work out your own salvation, each individual of you; make that your own which was once procured for all that would have it; work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. Your salvation (I speak to the baptized) is *begun*, you have *present* salvation—*i.e.*, you are in the way which leads to salvation. You have guaranteed to you, on conditions, the helps necessary to attain perfect salvation. You may derive, and should be deriving, present benefits from your salvation, and you should experience present joy in it.

You have, I say, present salvation. You have been made members of that One Body, which was sanctified, and which is able to sanctify all other bodies that are joined to it: you are branches of that glorious tree, whose sap, pervading every healthy branch, gives it present strength and develops its beautiful growth, and by and by will

produce the fruit of everlasting life. You have the life of CHRIST kindled in your souls. Your bodies are the temple of the Holy Ghost. Now is the day of salvation, and *present* salvation, too; not merely past salvation applied, not that you are washed in a lake whose waters *once* flowed from a glorious Fountain; not that you partake of a store of sanctification, long ago laid up; but that now each individual of you is operated upon by a present influence, deriving directly from the source, the water of life, having sanctification produced in you by the now-working and influencing Spirit. Creatures of the present, there is a present salvation for you; and that does not mean merely that you have for yourselves to seek and lay hold of a ready salvation, but that a merciful and grace-giving GOD, a loving Saviour, an indwelling Spirit, are present with you, and personally operating upon you for your salvation.

Dear brethren, try to understand and feel this. Do not suppose that GOD'S gifts are in any way separated from the Giver by time or by distance. Once for all, He resolved to give, but severally as each needs and rightly seeks, He gives; and when He gives, it is not by messengers, through long mediums, *but out of His own hand.* The bread which we break and the cup which we bless,

are the communion of the Body and Blood of CHRIST. The bread is not the Body, nor the wine the Blood, nor is the reception of them the way of applying to us any stored up blessings; but when we keep the ordinance which CHRIST has appointed, then He fulfils His promise of blessing us, and, with the sign, Himself the reality enters into our souls.

> There present in the heart,
> Not in the hands, th' eternal Priest
> Will His true self impart.

And so of all other ordinances. They are nothing, and give nothing of themselves. Their whole value—but what an unspeakable value it is—consists in their being appointed ways of bringing us into direct communication with a present GOD, our Father, our Saviour, our Sanctifier!

But there is another view to take of present salvation—namely, that from its very nature, it cannot be received at any one time in perfection, in such a state as to need no care to preserve it, no sustentation and renewal, no constant direction and blessing from the Author, and Regulator, and Finisher of it. It is spiritual life. Who does not know to what hazards life may be exposed, and how, from its very nature, it requires to be fed with proper food, and kept in health, and ex-

ercised, and developed? It is a spiritual sap. And what a mockery of life and support to the branch, would be one single, separated, unrenewed imparting from the vine, of the sap, which indeed ceases to be sap when the flow from the trunk is interrupted! The work of salvation is GOD's work, begun by Him, continued by Him, and to be completed by Him—therefore, it must have His continued personal superintendence. He must work in us to will and to do of His good pleasure.

Thus is salvation *present* as distinguished from the *past*.

But in another sense it is now the day of salvation. We have not to expect it as a thing wholly future, we must not delay to close with it as though there were a better time and way of doing that to be afforded hereafter. Salvation is present in its rewards and effects.

This, again, is a truth we need to be impressed with. We are wont to look too much to the future, to *hope* to be with GOD hereafter, to *long* for salvation, to sigh for the season of sanctification. By and by we shall be comforted. By and by we shall be strengthened. By and by we shall be holy and happy! Thus it is that we only expect salvation, that we persuade ourselves that

we are not to receive anything here by way of real spiritual joy and blessing, and that we are not required to reach any high degree of spiritual excellence here! But, brethren, how unreasonable is this persuasion. To believe that GOD is present with us and operating upon us, and pouring out His benefits upon us all our lives, and yet that we are none the better, that we do not derive any blessedness from Him: or, again, to believe that GOD has given us spiritual life, that He imparts to us, and constantly superintends, the grace which justifies and sanctifies; and yet that we can, or at least need make no use of this grace, not grow in it, not become purer, and holier, that it is ineffectual, that we may consent to its being ineffectual till life is over—O is not such a persuasion unreasonable, are we not ashamed of it? Imagine a mother not feeding or taking care of her infant, and yet counting on its thriving! or, fondly and diligently tending, taking care of her infant, and continuing to do so year after year, yet perfectly satisfied though it gained no strength, did not grow, nor walk, nor speak, nor show the slightest sign of getting out of babyhood! Imagine, I say, satisfaction with such a state, and hope all the while, yea, conviction, that presently, when the usual number of years were

over the child would somehow be a man! Or, imagine the husbandman expecting a harvest without sowing, or ploughing; or planting his field diligently, and rejoicing in refreshing rains, and ripening suns, yet not disappointed if the ear did not ripen, or even if the blade did not spring up; not concerned about it, not expecting it, sure of harvest at the usual time, even if that usual time should be next week, and there were yet no sign of a crop! Imagine this! you say. Such imagination is idle; it is a mockery of common sense to suppose such a thing possible. Well, then, my brethren, what is to be said of the spiritual nurses of the new life of GOD in the soul, of the spiritual husbandman of the seed of grace in the heart, who do nothing towards, or who expect nothing of present salvation? Brethren, NOW is the day of salvation, the day in which salvation is offered, in which it is actually conferred, in which it should be working and growing, yea, and bestowing its joy and peace. If in aught of this it fails, be sure there is some fault in yourselves—it is not that grace is of itself unreal, or unproductive, but that you receive it in vain, that you do not sufficiently heed and reverence it, that you do not sufficiently guard it, and sustain and refresh it, that you do not sufficiently use it.

There ought to be in every baptized Christian, a gradual, steady, and even perceptible Christian progress. Our salvation ought to be ever nearer and nearer than when we believed, not only in the expectation of our complete adoption and removal to glory, but in our fitness for glory, and desire and hope of it. If we have the same evil tendencies, are as easily overcome by the same temptations, have the same dislike or imperfect taste for spiritual occupations, the same poor appreciation of religious privileges and hopes as we had a year, a month, a week ago, then assuredly our salvation stagnates, we are not using what GOD has given us, we are not yielding to, we are resisting His living influence! Grace, my brethren, is an useless gift, if it is to effect nothing: a time of probation is an idle space, if there is no trial. Faith is little entitled to be called "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen," if it produces no spiritual conviction: and as for hope—what kind of anchor is it to the soul, if it is ever shifting, if it grasps nothing?

If any man is in CHRIST, he is a new creature, that is, he is becoming a new creature, with new life, and powers, and energies, and tastes, and aims, and hopes. He will grow in grace if he

has rightly received it, and in the knowledge and love of CHRIST. He will manifestly (at least to himself manifestly) be putting off the old man with his affections and lusts, and putting on the new man, which after GOD is created in righteousness and true holiness. He will endure trials more and more patiently, as seeing more clearly Him who is invisible. He will resist temptations more easily, and do good more consistently and gladly, and be more pained and more penitent after every sin. He will have a growing love of searching GOD'S word, and speaking to Him in prayer and praise, and receiving Him in Holy Communion. He will gradually be raised above the world, and will soar higher in imagination and affection and hope towards heaven. Each day will have witnessed some advance—or some more than recovery if there has been a relapse. And when the night cometh, the end of the day of attaining salvation, he will want but little to complete his resemblance to CHRIST, his pattern, and to perfect his salvation.

If, then, brethren, you would obtain an answer to the momentous question, Whether you shall be saved, whether there is a good hope that you are in the way of salvation, I would bid you not so much look back to your Baptism and Confirmation,

and count the number of your attendances on Holy Communion, of the sermons you have heard, the prayers and praises you have offered—though these are all great things—but rather, I would say, ascertain whether you have present salvation, for the future depends on the present; and to ascertain this, examine well whether you are putting off the old man and putting on the new, as I have just described. As another test—and a very great help in godliness, to which there is no equal in feelings and exercises—inquire into your hope of future salvation (by which I do not mean only your expectation, but also your eager desire), and into your joy for present salvation.

If religion is a reality, it is a great reality. Its immediate blessings are so precious, and its prospects so transcendently glorious, that the man who is not filled with joy and desire on their account, has no part or lot in them, or is strangely culpably ignorant of his privileges and his hopes. No wonder that he easily yields to sin, that he finds spiritual employments wearisome, that he makes no progress in salvation. If GOD touches him and he feels not, if heaven has come down to him and he knows it not, if glory is revealed to him, and he does not burn for it, if CHRIST has put him in the ark and he is not comforted by the

immediate deliverance and counting on the perfect salvation—then, surely, he has received the grace of GOD to little sanctifying, and so to little saving purpose!

O let him beseech GOD earnestly and perseveringly to give him spiritual sight and feeling, to fill him with joy and peace in believing, to make him rejoice, not only for what he has, but for what he expects of salvation; working, like St. Paul, in view of the crown laid up, confident that, whether absent or present, he is accepted by GOD, knowing that to depart is to be with CHRIST.

But, lastly, let him guard and pray against mistaking *present* for perfect salvation, the road and discipline and growth for heaven, for heaven itself. The possession which he has, precious as it is, is not a perfect one; and, moreover, he may lose it. Remember Paul's care, lest he should be a castaway, his caution to take heed lest we fall, his fearful sayings about forfeited grace. O brethren, seek as the best immediate blessing and the best stimulus to godliness, an assurance of hope in perfect salvation. But be sure that it is founded upon the reception and right use and evident growth of grace, upon present salvation; and, withal, be not high-minded, but fear. You know your own frailties, the influences of the

world, the subtlety and tremendous power of Satan's temptations. Any of these is sufficient to make you wander out of the right way, or stand still, or turn back, or to cause you to faint in your spiritual course, and even to threaten the destruction of your spiritual life. You are sure of GOD, of His favour, of His upholding, of His preserving you unto the day of perfect redemption; but you are not sure of your observance of the conditions on which only you may count on Him. And if you disregard these conditions, then are you plainly taught, by precept and example, that a neglected GOD will not abide with you, and a resisted Spirit will not strive with you, and that grace received in vain will be taken away. Remember this, let it keep you from presumption, make you watchful against temptation, always clothed in the armour of GOD, and wielding the sword of the Spirit, and abounding in the work of the LORD; praying, too, always, that the present may be an earnest of the future, that the Spirit will sustain, and sanctify, and perfect you, and that GOD, Who has begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of JESUS CHRIST.

SERMON XV.

CHRIST TOUCHED.

ST. MARK, V., 30.

And JESUS, *immediately knowing in Himself that virtue had gone out of Him, turned Him about in the press, and said, Who touched my clothes?*

A CROWD always waited on our LORD when He taught or walked openly. In this case, there was an unusually great crowd following and thronging Him, because it had become known that He was on His way to work the miracle of raising up a child from the point of death. It is not hard to guess what were the elements of this crowd. First, there were the idle, curious multitude ever to be found where novelty or excitement is promised. Then there were those who knew not why they were come together, who were there because others were, who had no mind or interest in the matter. (There are always

many of these in every crowd.) Then there were the scribes and lawyers, always talking about, listening to, or disputing religious truths—never coming, or caring to come, to the knowledge and practice of the truth. Then there were the seekers after loaves and fishes, who hoped to get something by coming. Then there were the entrappers and enemies of our LORD, seeking for witness against Him, hoping to see some work done, to hear some word said which might form the ground of accusation against Him. And, lastly, there were some—a few only—whom faith impelled to seek from Him the healing of their diseases, the relief of their burthens; and whom love drew after Him, to see Him, to serve Him, to dwell upon the gracious words that proceeded out of His mouth. Of the last class was a woman who had been afflicted with a grievous malady for twelve years, who had tried all earthly means of relief, and had grown worse under them, who was despised and shut out from the company of mankind by reason of her visitation, who had become destitute in seeking cure. All things were against her. Her misfortunes were what many would describe as more than could be borne. Her case was hopeless. Nothing seemed left to her but to succumb to helpless misery, and wait in groans

and tears for death—when, lo! a sudden gleam of brightest hope burst upon her, there was a Physician Who could cure all diseases, and His remedy was to be had without price! It does not appear whether the fame of JESUS had reached her in some remote place, whence she had dragged her poor afflicted body, sighing and groaning, wandering many days, searching in many places; or whether, being "accidentally," as men say, near where the crowd passed, she had now heard, for the first time, of the new Prophet; and, gathering from the passers-by that He was going to restore a dying damsel, concluded that the posssessor of such power, so graciously exercised, could and would heal her too. Be that as it may, she had full faith in His ability: "If I may but touch his clothes I shall be whole." And, having such faith, she resolved to act upon it, making her way through the crowd, and doing that, through which her faith suggested the power would be transmitted. How she came to propose to herself, or who proposed to her, such a course, how much of ignorance and superstition there was in it, is beside our present consideration. Her faith, her perseverance, her humility, are rather the things to be noted. Her faith, which was so strongly convinced of the existence in JESUS, and the

certainty of being able to obtain from Him the grace of healing. Her perseverance, poor, feeble, tottering woman! which was not overawed by the greatness of the crowd, and did not give up when she was dragged hither and thither, hard pressed here, shut out there—perhaps even thrown down and trampled on more than once. Her humility, which—eager as she was for cure, bent, too, as she was upon having it—made her fear the eyes of the crowd, though she cared nothing for their thrusts and hard usage, which dared not face her Healer; which caused her to shrink back from the first touch, and seek to hide herself, and steal away with the blessing.

Pausing here for a moment, brethren, to consider that this woman, in her malady, is a type of all who are affected with the disease of sin; that in the fruitless issue of her recourse to earthly physicians, she allegorises the vanity, the mockery, of all human expedients to restore or ameliorate moral distempers; showing that such "remedies" do but cause to suffer more, and make worse—pausing, I say, to consider this, and to reflect that herein we have a representation of ourselves as sinners, of our helplessness but for CHRIST, of our greater suffering and sure deterioration, through our very efforts to become better without

CHRIST; reflecting on this, realising it, and feeling it, are we able to go on and see in her discovering of the right Healer, in her efforts to be healed by Him, in her faith, and perseverance, and humility, what we have discovered, what we believe, and what we do, and what we feel? O what a pitiable sufferer is that, who hears with indifference or with lukewarm inactive belief, that there is a Physician that can make well; who knows that He is ready, that restoration is to be had, and yet does not seek it; who even pleads infirmity as a reason for not striving to be cured; who is deterred by the sight of a crowd that must be got through; who is discouraged by the first obstacle, and gets up and goes back after the first fall! And how blinded are the senses, and how dead the feelings of the sinner, who does not feel the degradation of his state, but makes open display of himself before the crowd, and with a bold front and unshrinking touch, comes to the All-pure and All-holy to be healed! Learn, fellow sinners, from this poor woman, what your sin is, how defiling, how miserable, how sure to grow worse under human treatment. Learn, too, by Whom alone it can be healed, and with what efforts, and what feelings, you must seek the healing. For, consider how the All-seeing eye and the All-

sympathising heart beheld and loved that woman, for her deeds and feelings. *Before* she touched Him, the virtue, the power of healing, was made ready to flow; and, as soon as she had touched, she was called forth, and commended, and owned, and further blessed: "Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague."

Partly, no doubt, for the sake of others, this manifestation and speech were made. JESUS generally hid His wondrous works from the gaze of the masses, and forbade that they should even hear of them by the hearing of the ear: just as He concealed the meaning of His speech by veiling it in parables, hard to be understood, that mere curiosity might not be indulged, that faith might have some privilege over want of faith, that needless provocation of His enemies might be avoided, and witness against Him withheld, that those who He knew would see and hear in vain, might be spared the greater condemnation of beholding and despising. Sometimes, however, an exception was made, and JESUS spoke and acted openly; that those present might see, and those absent migh hear of Him, and so come unto Him and be saved. This may have been the case here. Or, more probably, the manifestation was not so

much for the multitude, it was for the inner circle; for Jairus, whose faith needed to be prepared, for the shock of the coming announcement—"Thy daughter is dead, why troublest thou the Master any more?" or for better heeding of the injunction, "Be not afraid, only believe;" for the disciples, too, whom He would thus confirm in the faith, and prepare for their mission and sufferings, whom He would thus enable to record for our instruction and comfort, the things which JESUS has done, which He is ever ready to do again. But, specially, it was for the woman herself; that she might not suppose that she had obtained *unknown* possession of a blessing, or that it was the mere touch which cured her, and not the All-knowing Healer, pleased by her faith and so making effectual an otherwise useless act; that she might become acquainted with Him, and so learn to love Him, and gratefully remember Him, and by and by, when she came to know his will, might delight to do it; that she might have something more than she sought—this is ever the rule of CHRIST'S giving—the "Go in peace," as well as the "Be whole of thy plague;" that she might be taught, and we, through her, that Divine mercy is ever to be acknowledged, and open glory to be given to GOD.

The history is replete with profitable suggestions—lessons of faith and practice. Let us select three for present consideration.

First, let us observe, that we may throng and press JESUS, and yet not touch Him. "Thou seest the multitude thronging Thee, and sayest Thou who touched me?" Even so! The idle, curious, controversial, captious thronging is nothing accounted of: it is the touch of eager desire and humble faith which alone is noticed. At first, brethren, we are tempted to think, that the most strangely indifferent, the most unblessed of men, are those who do not join the throng, and press about the LORD JESUS. That He is in the sanctuary, and men do not enter into His presence there; that He is teaching the way of life, and men will not hear sermons nor read the Bible; that He may be conversed with, and yet men will not pray; that He may be touched, and yet sacraments are not received: this, we think, is as strange as it is sad. And so, indeed, it is. But it is stranger and sadder, that any should come into the Sanctuary, and not perceive CHRIST'S presence; that they should hear and read without learning; that they should use words of prayer and yet not be heard; that they should press and throng JESUS in ordinances, and never touch Him;

deriving no benefit from Him, because they seek it not aright; being beneath His eye, and yet unnoticed; crowding around Him, and upon Him, and yet unfelt! But assuredly, as of old it was, so it is now. If mere idleness brings men to the Sanctuary, mere observance of a decent fashion, if they come only to hear and see something new, to wile away the time which hangs wearily upon them, to gain themselves a good name as respectable and pious, if they are watching to see what may be criticised, what may be talked about and condemned, if they are rendering merely a formal obedience, and offering only an outward service—then, I was going to say, CHRIST takes no more notice of them than if they were not present; but I should rather say, He is wrathful against them for being present. He blinds their eyes, and turns away His own. He is dumb to them; they deaf to Him. He yields nothing to them, though they seem like Moses to have cleft the rock. He feels them not, though they squeeze and press! My brethren, it may be that some of you have long been in the company of CHRIST, have missed very few opportunities of public worship, have become very familiar with the Scriptures, have often repeated prayers and psalms, have been frequent communicants, and yet are none the

better in feeling and desire, have experienced no spiritual relief, have no more love or perception of the truth, than if you had been utter strangers to CHRIST, and never been near Him nor heard of Him. Hence it may be that religion is to you but a name: it profits you not, it affords you no delight, it exercises no influence upon you. Would you know why? Because you have been but thronging and pressing, because you have had no real sense of your misery, have entertained no real desire to be relieved and blessed, and so have made no well-directed, persevering effort to touch CHRIST! You are, as you feel, no better, no wiser, than if there were no CHRIST, or you had never been near Him! And you will never be wiser and better, however much you press and throng, till you realise your want, and are convinced that CHRIST alone can relieve it, and come to Him faithfully, resolutely, humbly, to touch the hem of His garment, and be healed of your plague. First, then, strive to know what you want, and to be convinced that CHRIST can and will grant it; and, then, feeling the desire of it, being sure from Whom alone it can be had, and how it must be sought, draw near—with the feeling of necessity, with the perseverance of desire, with the consciousness of unworthiness—and effect the

touch of faith. You shall not, in that case, remain unblessed; your plague shall be stayed, your faith shall be commended, your effort crowned, your humility exalted; you shall have more than you sought; enlarge your desire as you will, it shall be more than satisfied: and He whom you would but touch, and then shrink away, shall call you forth, and own, and bless you, and give you everlasting peace and perfect salvation.

Next, let us observe, that nothing can keep back and nothing hide from CHRIST. We are sometimes tempted, in the deep sense of our unworthiness, in review of the distance between us and the Healer, of the many obstacles which intervene, to give up in despair, and say to ourselves, "It is of no use trying, I am not fit for such a blessing, and if I were, I cannot reach it." Now, consider, who could be more unfit, and who more unable to approach CHRIST than this poor woman. There was a positive law which forbade her coming; her touch was pollution: yet CHRIST reproached her not with disregarding that law, nor refused her because of it; and when she touched He did not recoil, but encouraged her. For *us* there is no excommunicating law. From us CHRIST is pledged not to recoil. "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden," is an

invitation, a positive command. "Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out," is a most solemn pledge. Why, then, should we shrink? What shall we fear? And as for difficulties and hindrances, our own infirmities, the opposition of the world or the Devil, the sneers of despisers, the distance, the crowd, the hurrying on, can aught compare with what threatened this woman, and what she overcame? O are we not ashamed to forego salvation, to keep away from CHRIST, to desist from determination to reach Him, by any plea of personal infirmity, or of difficulty in the way? What in ourselves is worse than the twelve years' growing, enfeebling, overwhelming malady of this woman? What in aught around us is more impenetrable than the great crowd? and whenever was CHRIST as distant from us as He was from her? And then as to the discouragement which Satan would suggest to us, that in our age we cannot, like this poor woman, get anything from CHRIST by stealth; that the power to heal flows not unconsciously; that He must see, and approve, and stay for us, and even anticipate us; and that by reason of our insignificance and the wide extent of His dominion, it is not reasonable to suppose that we shall be observed—brethren, are we not assured, by the

fact that *she* was discerned, and watched for, and singled out from the great multitude, that the gaze which is comprehensive enough to include all is particular enough to distinguish each; that there is nothing beneath His notice; that He can get through, and will get through, all that stands between us and Him: that He who keeps vast globes in their orbits, takes thought even for sparrows; that He counts the hairs of each individual's head; that He hears each sigh, and feels each sorrow; that the roar of the universe is not louder in His ear than the feeblest cry of distress from the lowest of His creatures? O it is a blessed assurance, and one for which we should be heartily thankful, that it was always when there was most to distract, that CHRIST was most closely attentive; that it was in the most dazzling glare that He saw most clearly; that it was when He seemed most absorbed in other aims, that His notice and help were most readily secured; that in the way to raise the daughter of Jairus, He was so easily stopped to heal and bless the woman with the issue of blood! No sight too insignificant to escape His eye; no sound too faint to reach His ear; no crowd so great as to hide the individual; no object so engrossing as to exclude from notice, or to hurry on from concern for the *least*, the unworthiest of other objects!

Lastly, let us observe that power to heal was ready to flow wherever there was a channel made for it. We are not, of course, to understand that CHRIST healed unconsciously; that any mere formal touch secured, as it were, without the violation of His will, the grace which He was anointed to bestow; but we are to understand, that such is the law of grace, that where there is a demand there is a supply; that like as the thirsty sand surely drinks in the rising wave, like as a sponge absorbs the water into which it is plunged, so the sensibly void heart, the yearning desire, the faithful effort, the moral fitness, is sure of what it wants and seeks, if it is found in the place where what it wants exists. It is one of the most wonderful, most mysterious, and at the same time most sure effects of CHRIST's incarnation that human nature, needing and desiring, put into communion with Him, possessing, overflowing, shall have by the necessary operation of an invariable law, the thing which it wants, and which He has to bestow. There is no chance, no mere probability in the case: CHRIST is the ever-flowing fountain; if you stand beneath, the water must come over you. He is the root full of sap, if you are one of the branches joined to Him, the sap shall flow into and permeate you.

It is this which makes ordinances effectual signs of grace; means, not by which grace may *perhaps* be bestowed, but by which it is *sure* to be bestowed, if they are rightly used. The woman, whose history we have been considering, might have been disappointed in her hope: for CHRIST had not taught her, nor made her any promise, nor prescribed to her any course; but He has so enlightened *us* in the mystery of His Incarnation; He has so pledged to us His grace; He has so shown us how to obtain it, that we may most confidently say, "If I may but touch, I shall be whole." Grace, the manifold grace of CHRIST's glorified body—the source of sanctification and every blessing, is ready to flow, and will flow as soon as He is touched. Of course, as we have seen, this touch must be directed by right feeling; but still, observe, there must be a touch. "Thy faith hath saved thee." Not because it kept thee still, sighing for, talking of, waiting for Me, but because it roused thee, and made thee encounter so much, and do so much to come and touch Me. Faith gives quality to the touch, but, after all, the touch secures the blessing. So it ever is. The touch necessary, and the touch effectual. "He that believeth *and is baptized* shall be saved." "Except ye eat the flesh of the

Son of man and drink His blood, ye have no life in you." The water of Baptism is the laver of regeneration. The bread which we break, and the cup which we bless, are the Communion of the Body and Blood of CHRIST. Using the outward part rightly, you do certainly receive the inward grace: for as soon as CHRIST is rightly touched, and these are appointed ways of touching, immediately—as it were, spontaneously—virtue to heal goes out of Him.

Let it not, however, be supposed, that this view of the way of healing and sanctifying makes CHRIST a servant of grace instead of the LORD of grace; that it directs us to a mere storehouse to help ourselves, instead of sending us to a living, loving, discerning Saviour, of Whom we are to crave the help and blessing which are His to give as He will. No, brethren, it exalts ordinances, but only because they are CHRIST'S ordinances, the clothes in which He is clad, as He walks among us, the garments through which power to heal is transmitted from Him to us. The use of these things without a sense of unworthiness, without humility and faith, is like the thronging of CHRIST by the crowd, not only unprofitable, but rude and profane; and this sense of unworthiness, this humility and faith, together

with the power and perseverance to act upon them, are all the gifts of CHRIST, seed sown, increase given by Him according to His will. Look, then, to the Physician, as well as to the remedy, to the Giver of grace as well as to the Channel of grace; and, knowing that without Him you can do nothing, and except from Him receive nothing, beseech Him to enable you to seek grace rightly, and then to bestow it freely, not for any worthiness, for any feeling, for any deed; but simply because of your necessity, out of His boundless love.

SERMON XVI.

PREACHING PARABLES.

EZEKIEL, XX., 49.

Ah LORD GOD! *they say of me, Doth he not speak parables?*

EZEKIEL had been commissioned with the utterance of a warning, in figurative but very intelligible language, that GOD was about to bring a great calamity upon Jerusalem and all Judah; that young and old, good and bad, should be affected by it—"I will kindle a fire in thee, and it shall devour every green tree and every dry tree"; that the judgment should be irresistible "the flaming flame shall not be quenched," and the destruction universal; "all faces from the south to the north shall be burned therein." According to some expositors, as soon as he received this commission, concluding from his past experience that the Jews would profess not to understand his message, or would say, that it was an

exaggeration, or that it did not apply to them, and so disregard it, he entreated of GOD, in the words of the text, that such an excuse might be taken away by the delivery instead of a plain and unmistakeable warning: "O LORD, not a parable. Thy people will not heed parables." Whereupon GOD, in gracious condescension to His prophet, in determination to be heard and understood by the people, substituted for this first message, not indeed wholly unfigurative language, but a simpler parable, which carried with it to all its own interpretation. But it is better, I think, to suppose, that Ezekiel does not here anticipate the people's perversity, and so persuade GOD at once to withdraw His words; but that he narrates and grieves over the actual reception which the message, faithfully delivered, had encountered. The people would not hear it. They said it was obscure: a parable, an enigma, a poetical exaggeration. GOD did not speak to them by it; or, if He did, they could not tell what He said. "Ah! LORD GOD—alas! it is the old tale—I told them Thy words, but they would not hear; they turned away from me, saying, Surely we cannot understand him."

Whichever was the case, whether Ezekiel only expected, or actually experienced this treatment,

we are sure that it was not wholly on account of special obscurities which veiled the matters he had to declare, nor on account of any special deafness and hardness of heart which belonged to that people. For every Christian teacher has had reason to anticipate, has actually endured the like from Christian congregations.

Often and often in preparing for the pulpit, is the preacher tempted to set aside some important theme, to withhold some wonderful truth, to forbear even to suggest some glorious consolation, because he believes that in uttering it, he will not have the ears, or, if he has the ears, he will not have the minds of his hearers; that they will not understand his saying; and so, of course, will not receive it. Often and often, too, when having used the full liberty of a Christian prophet and whatever ability GOD has given him, of simplifying to the utmost, and recommending with all his energy, the Gospel message, he is constrained to feel, he is made, perhaps, by men's open speech to know, that he is regarded as the setter-forth of unmeaning, extravagant, or inapplicable words. Of course, this charge is not always unfounded. We are not inspired: we often speak our own words; our minds may not have rightly conceived the subject we would discuss, or we may be want-

ing in ability to express clearly what we understand. Under various influences we do, too, at times speak more or less extravagantly, and our knowledge and discretion are not so complete, that we invariably select what is precisely suited to our hearers. In such cases, we ought to expect, we have no right to complain of, the rejection, the disregard, or the fruitlessness of our preaching. But, brethren, when we are sure that the fault lies not in the preacher, when he has taken pains to enter into and reveal the mind of the Spirit, to teach what he knows God would have you understand and believe, to urge what he knows God would have you do, to describe and recommend what he knows God would have you love and seek—when he has done this, and you receive not his words, excusing yourselves by saying that he is obscure, or over-strict, or fanciful, or enthusiastic, or anything else—oh! then has he not a right to complain to God? yea; and is it not his duty to remonstrate with you? Brethren, we charge not such as you who are here assembled with the wilfulness of Ezekiel's hearers. In you we do not suppose there is any actual unbelief, or deliberate dislike of the truth. It is not forced in your case upon unwilling ears: for you come to hear it. It is not rejected because

you hate it. Nevertheless, we have somewhat against many of you of Ezekiel's complaint, respecting your treatment of the read or preached Word of God.

We have to complain, brethren, that many of you are under the mistaken notion that you have almost a right to select the preacher's theme, at least to dictate its mode of treatment; and that if your right is disregarded, then you are justified in excusing yourselves for not profiting or heeding. Bear with me, beloved. Is it not the case, that you sometimes find fault with the subject of the sermon? You do not want to hear so much about man's depravity: you do not like the preacher to make such a point of observing religious ordinances: what a high standard of morality he sets up; how strict is the holiness he describes; why will he discourse of the horrors of hell? So, again, of the manner of treatment. You do not care for argument; you cannot enter upon theories; you are weary of quotations of historical illustrations; the style is too florid, or too bald: it is poetical; or it is commonplace; or somehow it is not what you like; and therefore—I would not say you turn away from it, but you do not try, as much as you ought, to heed it; and you excuse yourselves for not improving under it by blaming the preacher.

The fact is, there is too often a great forgetfulness of the fact, that when the preacher speaks to you it is your part to be as listeners and learners of GOD. It is not for you to choose the subjects, nor to dictate the method of teaching. It is true, perhaps, that your taste and aptitude are greater for some subjects than others: it is true that you are more easily enlightened, and impressed, and influenced in some ways than in others. It is natural, and I would not say it is wrong, for you to prefer those subjects and ways; but be sure nevertheless, that it is the very contrary of wisdom and humility, of reverence for GOD, of regard for duty and interest, not to give the most earnest heed to whatever GOD says to you through His servant, to dare to treat it lightly, because either of the topic or the way of handling it. When a message comes to you from GOD, surely it is no reason for not receiving it, that you would prefer a message about something else! And if the diction in which that message is clothed is hard or distasteful to you, while you may lament it, may ask for an explanation, may solicit consideration for your taste, or help in overcoming your distaste, you may not on any account disregard what has been said. The word gone forth shall not return. Where the seed has been sown, increase

shall be expected. The day is coming, when all your opportunities and means of knowing GOD'S will, and all your incentives to serve Him, shall be taken account of by Him Who has afforded them, and then shall the worst preacher, the most apparently obscure and inapplicable sermon you ever heard be a witness for or against you, to testify what regard you had for GOD'S message, what humility, what teachableness, what readiness to receive and to do what was clear, what anxious diligence and pains to understand what was obscure.

Brethren, you may choose what subjects you will hear discussed in the secular lecture-hall, and if you do not like the entertainment you may refuse to be entertained by it, and resolve to hear no more of it, to dismiss it altogether from your thoughts. But you do not come to church to be entertained; you have no option there of selecting or rejecting. It is your misfortune (though it may be his fault) if the preacher does not interest you, or the sermon immediately commend itself to your mind, and to your heart; but, being there, you must hear whatever is said, and however it is said; and having heard, be sure you must give account to GOD of the hearing! Settle this in your minds, impress yourselves with the solemn

authority of the preacher, and with the importance and responsibility of heeding him, and it will be very seldom that you will object even in thought, "Doth he not speak parables?"

But there are particular complaints, about which I would say a few words specially.

First, there is a complaint against the preaching of mysterious and profound truths. If the preacher dwells upon such a subject as the Incarnation of CHRIST, the nature of CHRIST'S presence with His Church, of the Spirit's indwelling, or the rationale of the efficacy of the means of grace; or if he attempts to explain any difficult text, no matter what pains he may take to simplify the subject, how he may labour to show its importance and to recommend its consideration, he is met at once with the objection that he speaks parables, and so with a tacit refusal to heed. "Why puzzle one's brains," it is urged, "with such matters, when there are so many simple themes and easy lessons in the Gospel. I cannot understand such things. They are too profound. The preaching of them may be clever, but it is thrown away upon me. I do not want to work and task my mind, but to warm my feelings." Such is the reward the preacher often gets for taking unusual pains to edify his hearers! Such is the wilful,

the determined ignorance of many of GOD'S people respecting those truths, the understanding of which most concerns them, and honours Him. It ought to be sufficient to correct these unwise and unwilling, to remind them that whatever GOD has revealed He requires to be accepted, and that as there can be no acceptance of that which is not understood, it is a foremost duty of the Christian preacher and the Christian learner to employ themselves in the solution of Scripture difficulties, and the comprehension of revealed mysteries. Such objectors do not intend it, but they grievously slight GOD when they refuse to heed so much of His teaching, yea, they even cast a slur upon His wisdom in striving to teach what, according to them, cannot be learnt. And are they not unjust to themselves? Have they really such narrow and shallow understandings, so impossible to widen and deepen? Would they confess to such incapacity if they were listening to a scientific lecture? would they complain if the lecturer introduced them to new facts, showed them fresh experiments, suggested to them explanatory theories, sought to make them wiser than they were? Would they shut their ears at the sound of the first new term: would they shrink back at the first invitation to tread upon unfamiliar ground;

would they protect themselves against being enlightened, by claiming to be hopelessly ignorant? Would they not rather make the most of the opportunity, opening ear and stretching mind to catch all they could, finding pleasure in being carried beyond and above themselves, resenting indignantly a hint that the thing was out of their reach, professing, somewhat ostentatiously pretending a greater delight and fuller understanding than they really had? O why is it the fashion to claim to be so wise in secular matters, to boast of ignorance in religion? It is well, indeed, that men should not sham to be wise in God's presence, but it is ill, very ill, that they sham to be ignorant, or that they should be content to be ignorant when they might be wise, ignoring and disowning the powers which God has given them!

Take these remarks, dear brethren, into your serious consideration. Remember that God has given you intelligent minds, in order that you might think of and serve Him with understanding. Much, indeed, about Him is absolutely incomprehensible; much has He designedly withheld; before many mysteries, has He put up the warning, "Draw not nigh hither;" but much has He told you plainly, and much has He propounded in sufficiently obscure or difficult terms, to task

and exercise your minds in their necessary unravelling. With respect to these things, as it is only by much resistance that you can withstand the temptations to which you are exposed; as it is only by great efforts that you can acquire the holiness without which no man shall see the LORD, so is it, only by real and often hard study, that you can attain unto the knowledge of which GOD has made you capable, and in which He bids you grow. The elementary, the vitally necessary truths of the Gospel are, it may be, within the immediate comprehension of the simplest and most uncultivated understanding; but shall it, therefore, be said to you, shall you be allowed to say of yourselves, that you need not be concerned about anything beyond? Would you be satisfied if you had only so much secular education as would enable you to spell out sign-post directions? Would it be no reproach to you, having so many faculties and opportunities, only to be able to read and count? Would you miss nothing of duty, of interest, of pleasure, if your intellect were uncultivated, if you were wholly unacquainted and totally unable to appreciate arts and sciences, poetry, music, literature, or any facts or theories not connected with your worldly calling, not necessary to procure your daily bread? Would

not life be irksome and intolerable, if held only on such terms? Would you not be ashamed of attempting to hold it on these terms? Would you not consider that you were robbing yourselves of all that was worth having? Would you not admit that you had missed and ignored your high calling, your power to be enlightened and wise beings, and had sunk shamelessly and guiltily to the level, below the level—for he answers the end of his creation—of the irrational brute? And shall you who feel such shame for worldly ignorance, shall you who make such efforts to gain secular knowledge, who are ever widening your minds, and storing up in them as much as they will hold, who delight in growing wiser and more learned, who will study unwearily, and exercise all your intellect, and consume I know not what time, in unravelling the worthless mystery of some enigmatical line in a poem of fiction—shall you contentedly pass over the difficulties, and remain ignorant of the mysteries which meet you in nearly every verse of the Word of God? Shall you be otherwise than glad and attentive when the preacher draws your attention to them? Shall you even unfairly and ungratefully charge him with *speaking* parables, when he is really *explaining* parables?

Dear brethren, it is rarely that the public preacher, who has to take thought for the simpler ones of the flock, can enlarge upon profound truths. When he does, take care that you make the most of the rare occurrence, and compensate for the forbidden frequency, by diligent private study, by ready use of that individual aid which the clergyman is as rejoiced, as he is bound, to afford you. Acquaint yourselves now, as far as may be, with GOD, and the things of GOD. Furnish yourselves with the answer, the want of which was such a reproach to Nicodemus, to the question—"How can these things be?" Show, at least, as much interest in salvation, in sanctification, in heaven, in eternal bliss, as will lead you to inquire what they are, and require, and promise. Get now the germ of that knowledge, which is to expand hereafter albut to an infinite grasp, and is to revel in spiritual science. Cast away the reproach of knowing not; provide against the doom which awaits him that improves not the talents entrusted him: "From him that hath not, shall be taken away even that he seemeth to have."

There is another class of objectors—to another kind of preaching. Those, namely, who resist the force of plain exhortations to repentance, self-

denial, submission, obedience, holiness, and the like; by persuading themselves that the preacher urges these severely and unduly. Doth he not speak parables, they say, exaggerating—describing ideal duties? Surely, what he urges is not the thing really required of us; surely, if we escape not with impunity, yet some allowance will be made for our want of it. Would he bring in all guilty? Would he cross every delight and desire of our life? Would he expect us so to subdue the spirit, so to overcome natural impatience, as never to resent, to shrink, to murmur? Must obedience be so uncompromising, so constant, so perfect, to be obedience at all? Is holiness so imperatively necessary? Surely the preacher is unreasonable, he is extravagant, he speaks parables. These objectors are easily answered. In this matter no teaching of our own can be more explicit, more exacting, more positive, and more unsparing, than that of the New Testament. When we enforce these things, we are backed by an authority which cannot be questioned; and are able to prove that our words are those of soberness and truth. "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." "Whosoever doth

not this, cannot be my disciple." "Whosoever loveth me, keepeth my commandments." "If any man love not the LORD JESUS, let him be anathema maranatha." "Without holiness no man shall see the LORD." Are these words parables, are they untrue, figurative, extravagant? And if not, what that we say, or can say, on this head, may be resisted or slighted, under the plea, that is a parable?

Once more. When we discourse from the pulpit, on a living and near Saviour, an indwelling Sanctifier, a surrouding spiritual tempter, on heaven or hell, on enduring as seeing Him who is invisible, on having our conversation in heaven, on the evidence of things unseen, on the feeling and grasping, so to speak, as though they were substantial and at hand, of things hoped for—oh! then, how many there are who hear us as though we were dreamers or narrators of fables, speakers who should be allowed some poetic license; who, to make their speech attractive, or perhaps from the spontaneous dictation of their enthusiasm, use figures of rhetoric and speak parables! I do not mean that these persons wilfully take up this position, that they are intentionally, or in desire, gainsayers of the truth, but merely that they do

not enter into its conception, and cannot rise to its height. They lag behind, they are earthy, they see only the visible, feel only the tangible to bodily senses. The temporal to them is real; the spiritual, not through unbelief, nor obstinacy, nor moral blindness, but from infirmity, and earthly-mindedness, and unspirituality, is regarded too nearly as unreal; and, therefore, when it is discoursed upon, they seem to be listening to empty dreams, and the preacher to be displaying flights of fancy.

Dear brethren—I speak to such—I know that many of you wish it were otherwise; you would that your mind could conceive, and that your heart could feel, these truths. In your best moments, you more than suspect that the preacher is right after all, and you are wrong; that *you* are dreaming, and not he; that his words are a parable only to those who will not see and hear. It is not in man to afford you much help, in coming to a right state. If I refer you to the Bible, which we do but echo from the pulpit, you will still say, Ah! but does not this, too, speak parables? If I bid you go and exercise your reason, or consult others who have done so, it is more than possible that you will come away from the consultation—alas! many do—more convinced

than before that we *do* speak parables, that each one is a GOD to himself, that there is no other devil than a man's own evil passions, that there is no hell but in a remorseful conscience, that eternity does not mean "for ever!" No; there is no help for you in man, in yourselves, or in others. You must, indeed, purify and elevate your affections, so that they may wish for better things; you must bring down your reason from the high seat where it sits, and speculates, and dictates; you must try to accept the truth that the natural man cannot receive nor judge of spiritual things; but, then, you must go to GOD Himself, and humbly, teachably, earnestly ask for that spiritual discernment which alone can see, and feel, and love the things of GOD. Do this, not once, but often; not negligently or hastily, but earnestly and perseveringly; and presently, if not all at once, yet gradually, most surely, your spiritual eyes shall be opened, you shall see GOD, you shall love CHRIST, you shall perceive the motions of the Holy Spirit. The invisible world shall be unveiled, and shall be found to contain all the beauties, all the horrors, and to hold out all the hopes and fears, to be as real, as near, as sure to be ours, for weal or woe, according as we are, or are not, Christians, as the preacher or the

Bible, of which he is the expounder, asserts. Thenceforth you will not complain of spiritual teaching that it is parabolic, of strong assertions of the obligation of Christian graces, that they are immoderate, too exacting, too severe. No! heart and mind will testify, and life will approve, "Lo, now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb." Yes; and knowing somewhat of GOD, and your relation to Him, and desiring to know more, whenever in your private reading of the Bible a difficulty meets you, or whenever the preacher discourses, as it seems, in parables, you will give the most earnest and interested heed, to see if you cannot divine the mystery; and failing that, instead of remaining in willing ignorance, you will use all the means placed within your reach, the comparing of parallel places, your commentaries, and the private instructions of your clergyman, pleading all the while with CHRIST, and urgently beseeching of Him, "LORD, thou knowest all things, declare unto me this parable."

Thus doing, you will soon find that to you it is given to know the mysteries of religion; and the knowledge, sanctified by the Spirit, will assuredly work in you a greater love of GOD, a more consistent and more successful pursuit of holiness, a

growing taste and eagerness for that better state, whence ignorance, in all its degrees, shall be banished for ever, and where we shall know even as now we are known.

SERMON XVII.

LIVING AND DYING UNTO GOD.

II. CORINTHIANS, v., 8, 9.

We are confident and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the LORD. *Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of Him.*

THE apostle had been speaking, in the preceding chapter, of the troubles and persecutions which he daily endured, and of the hopes and consolations—the life by faith rather than by right—which made their endurance easy. Having touched upon the theme, he could not but enlarge upon it; and doing so, his ardent expectations carried him out of the present, and made him covet and attempt to grasp the future. Before his enlightened eye and spiritualised heart, his affliction was light and its continuance brief; the present state was but as a tent, quickly to be

taken down, and then in its place should be digged the deep foundation and reared the abiding edifice of a building of GOD eternal in the heavens. Outstretched, then, were his thoughts, and desires, and earnest were his prayers, not so much to get rid of what he had, as to attain what he hoped for and was promised. He knew indeed that the tabernacle must be removed; that his present state must cease—either by actual death or by a change, which the quick at CHRIST'S coming must undergo, much the same as death; he felt the burthen which was upon him; he yearned and groaned to be rid of it; but looking to the end he disregarded the way; dwelling, not upon the change but what was to come after it, he sought not death, but life. He longed, not to be unclothed, but clothed upon. Nay, recognising the good, and so the desirableness of this life, shrinking too naturally from the thought of dissolution, he would keep the present till he had the future, he would have what he wanted *added* to what he possessed, rather than *substituted* for it. Present life was in many respects dear to him; he would that the evil were purged away from it, and the good left; and then that the good were augmented, enfolded, absorbed by the transcendent, satisfying perfect blessedness which GOD had

promised, and for the attaining whereof He had bestowed His effectually working Spirit.

At this point he seems to have sobered himself, or perhaps rather to have designedly exhibited the latent soberness and contentedness which had guided him all along. "We are confident," he says, that is, of good cheer, well comforted, easily bearing what is, patiently waiting for the future; preferring, indeed (if a preference be allowed), to be absent from the body and fully present with the LORD; but still chiefly animated, not by a selfish yearning for the quickest attainment of peace and glory, but by the noble, GOD-adoring ambition, of being and doing that which is divinely approved. "Wherefore, in view of all that is and shall be, we make it our chief aim, we devote ourselves, not so much to reach heaven, to gratify self, as whether on earth or in heaven, to enjoy the approval and favour of God." "Be silent," he would say, "ye groans for deliverance; check yourselves, ye eager aspirations for glory; let principle rule rather than desire, and let the principle be, whether we live let us live unto the LORD, whether we die let us die unto the LORD. Let not dying or living be the engrossing thought, but that whether we live or die we may be the LORD'S."

In this, as in so many other respects, our bright

exemplar, Paul, shows us both what we may allow and what we should aim at.

And first he shows us that even the saint—the approved of GOD—may shrink from the thought of dissolution. "We groan, being burthened, because" (this is the right translation) "we would not be unclothed," we would not die. I envy not the man—there is something unnatural, yea, and unspiritual, too, in him—who does not shrink from the first thought of death coming to himself or to those whom he loves. For death, in its best form, is a remembrancer of the wrath of GOD against the sinner, and it is in a sense a triumph—no matter that it is short—it is a defiling and withering touch—no matter that it shall soon be wiped away, and its blasting undone—of the foul and fierce enemy of GOD and holy man. It is that, too, which cuts asunder the ties which we are allowed and encouraged to fasten here between ourselves and loved friends and delightful pursuits and pleasing possessions. It is that, too, which abruptly closes the period of probation and preparation for heaven; which stays all cleansing and perfecting, which says imperatively to us, "No more shall you remove, no more shall you acquire—as you are shall you face GOD—stereotyped are you for eternity." It is that, too, which enthrals

and deadens the one half of us, though it liberates and quickens the other, which separates the body from GOD, while it joins the spirit to Him, which, while it exalts the latter to Paradise, consigns the former to the grave, to corruption, to temporary annihilation. Terrible is death to many, awful to all—undesirable even to the saint—and only tolerable because not so much of the soul's immediate gain as of the body's future hope. For if it were proposed to us to choose for eternity between perfect disembodied bliss, and very imperfect bliss in the body, there is no one, I conceive, who knows the capabilities of the body, both of rendering to GOD and receiving of Him, who would not prefer, and I think rightly, life in the flesh to life out of it.

The words of St. Paul exhibit in himself, and seem to allow in others, this shrinking from dissolution, this desire to keep the body, albeit changed, perfected, caught up into the heavens; to be spared the pulling down of the earthly tabernacle, even to make way for the heavenly eternal building.

But St. Paul goes on to show that this desire was secondary to that of exchanging faith for sight, imperfection for perfection. He would not on any account remain earthy: he longed for the

fullest and most glorious presence of GOD, and if it needs must be that the desired change and attainment could only be brought about by dissolution, oh, then he was ready, he was willing rather to be absent from the body. He returned from the shrinking; he rallied from the fear; he was confident, well content, and desirous to die.

And herein he is the pattern of a true Christian. He is not so in love with death that he can see nothing in it to shrink from or fear, nothing to disturb him. He does not so hate this life as to hurry to be quit of it. With all its trials, and disappointments, and hindrances, and miseries, there is much in it which is dear to him, in which he finds delight, from which he is loth to part. GOD, too, is felt here, and seen by faith, and bestows appreciable blessings; here GOD'S work is to be done, here GOD'S glory to be promoted. Therefore "to live is CHRIST." But still there are greater and better things beyond. There is a place where trouble never comes, where happiness is perfect, whose company, and possessions, and pleasures, are such, that nought on earth is worth having or thinking of in comparison of them. There is a state in which GOD'S work may be done as angels do it, without hindrance

from within or without; in which glory to GOD is easily, and fully, and delightfully rendered. There is a presence of GOD which is visible and palpable, where His voice is clearly heard, where He is beheld face to face, where the everlasting arms are substantially felt as they embrace and uphold, where His love is perfectly realised and enjoyed, and perfectly reciprocated.

What can be valued, or can interest in comparison of all this? What can content that is short of this? What can deter from the seeking of this? what valley seem dark and uninviting at the end of which this glory shines? what way be dreary and lonely, along which GOD's rod and staff are offered as supporters and comforters? This being the end and the aim, if to attain it death must be passed through, then welcome death! We are confident, full of cheer at the prospect, eager to set out—"To die is gain."

But the best feature of the Christian, as exhibited in St. Paul, remains for us to gaze on. After all, it is not the holiest ambition to aspire to heaven; it is not the highest vocation to enrich and perfect self. GOD has made us capable of heavenly bliss. He offers it to us. He would have us seek it; He blesses and will reward the

seeking. But still He did not make and redeem us, He does not sanctify us only or chiefly for this. The Christian's vocation is the service of GOD. The end of his being is the glory of GOD. And so our chief thoughts, and aspirations, and endeavours, are not to be deliverance from troubles, perfection in joy, getting out of the present into the future, exchanging earth for heaven; but, being and doing what GOD approves, wherever, in whatever circumstances, GOD appoints. "Wherefore we labour, that whether present or absent we may be accepted of Him;" that whether it pleases GOD to come to us while we are in the body, or to call us to Him out of the body, He may find us prepared for what in either case awaits us; "for we must all appear before the judgment-seat of CHRIST, that every one may receive according to the things done in the body."

The Christian may shrink from the first thought of death, and wish not to be unclothed. He ought to aspire to heaven, and that he may reach it, be well content, willing rather, to be absent from the body. But above all he must labour in whatever state he is, therein so to be serving GOD, as to have His present acceptance and always to be prepared for His coming judgment.

We want to feel this and to act upon it. To put self with even its most innocent instincts and best interests and noblest aspirations somewhat aside, that GOD may be more nearly all in all; to be less filled with groaning and coveting on our own account and more occupied in serving and glorifying CHRIST. It is well not to love this world, to have realised its vanity and misery, to have broken the links that would bind us to it, to refuse to find our perfect joy in aught that belongs to it. It is well to yearn for deliverance from all that vexes and hinders and hurts; to desire ardently—even to pray earnestly and continually for—presence with the LORD, and all that that presence implies, in Paradise, in Heaven. But when by GOD'S grace we have come to this state, we are not perfect, we have not *begun* to be perfect. No! we have only qualified ourselves in mind and heart for the commencement of that which is demanded of us in life, the single, contented, glad, immediate, and constant service of GOD in the state and circumstances in which He has placed us.

Brethren, we are all dwelling in tabernacles, tents that have no firm foundation; which are to be taken down and soon. The general judgment may tarry, CHRIST may not come in His

glorious majesty, and meet us while in the body: but if not then *death* will surely come, and out of the body we must go to meet CHRIST. How soon shall that be? How soon shall we meet Him? Do you ever give these things a serious thought? Do you ever consider that the apparently capricious last enemy is wont to take the young and strong as often as the old and feeble, and, *as* he chooses, sometimes to sound the warning note from afar off, sometimes to come silently, suddenly as a thief in the night? Do you feel—I single out each man, each woman, each child that hears me, and in GOD'S name I ask that individual—Do you feel that *you* may be Death's next victim, that ere the day is over you may be gone to your account, or at least the seeds of mortal disease may be beginning to grow in you? Oh, do not resist this appeal by persuading yourselves that the thing is improbable. Let it be enough that you know (and you do know) that it is possible, and, if possible, that you ought to entertain the possibility.

Well now, let me farther ask, Are you prepared, are you preparing to die? Are you going to leave the vast concerns of an eternal state to the consideration of a moment, a moment too which may be denied you, if not by the instant

cutting of life's thread, by mortal fears and lingerings, and recoilings, by the engrossing pains of the body, by the locking up of the senses in stupor or delirium? Are you putting off concern; heedless of thought and preparation for meeting GOD? Are you calculating upon being able to think and feel aright when you will, to ask and obtain pardon for all that is wrong, to be excused for all deficiencies in a moment, to do the work of life on a sick-bed, to satisfy GOD with the dregs of the cup of life, to become a passive recipient of the necessary holiness which GOD bids all acquire actively? Do you suppose it will suffice to think of these things when the doctor tells you you cannot recover; to send for the clergyman to teach and move you when the faculty of heeding is well nigh gone, to pray for you, if you are unable to pray for yourself, to sigh over your body, if, alas! the soul has fled? Or are you now more or less possessed with religious thought and feeling, sitting loose to this world, weaning yourselves more and more from it, nerving yourselves for the last hour, sighing over and confessing your sins, trusting to CHRIST'S mercy, aspiring to heaven, praying for acceptance? Whether you are indifferent to or merely postponing concern, for self's best interests, or whether you are already

absorbed by self's best interests, let me remind you—without presuming to set any bounds to GOD'S mercy, without disputing that GOD has sometimes received those who first turned to Him on a death-bed, without caring to satisfy those who want to know how little religion will save a man—let me remind you, I say, and do not be weary of the repetition, that to be truly acceptable to GOD, it is not enough that you entertain some religious thoughts, and go through some religious forms at the last, or even that you are filled with religious thoughts and feelings all your life long, you must be serving GOD now, in the day of your ability, at the call of every opportunity, in whatever state and circumstances you are placed, doing it as so much work set you to do and presently to be scrutinised and accounted for, rendering it as the faithful, grateful homage of a pardoned and sanctified and loving sinner. Let this be your rule, a rule to be observed not only in theory but in practice also; not only in the rendering of obedience, but in the treating of all that you have, and the accepting of all that happens to you, as from the LORD—"Whether we live, we live unto the LORD, or whether we die, we die unto the LORD."

SERMON XVIII.

RELIGIOUS ZEAL.

II. KINGS, X., 16.

Come with me, and see my zeal for the LORD.

JEHU, the son of Nimshi, one of the captains of Israel, had been selected and anointed by Divine command, to supplant King Joram, to smite the whole house of Ahab, and to avenge the poured-out blood of GOD'S servants, the prophets. It is easy to account for the choice of such an agent. GOD, we believe, performs no miracle unnecessarily. When what He wants exists already, He searches it out and uses it; instead of making a new creation, or changing and converting what, so to speak, comes first to hand. At this time He had need, for His purposes respecting Israel, of a man bold, impetuous, full of vigour, prompt to undertake, resolute, courageous, uncompromising to perform. Such an one pre-

eminently, was Jehu; and therefore, said the LORD, "I have anointed thee king over the people of the LORD, even over Israel, and thou shalt smite the house of Ahab thy master, that I may avenge the blood of My servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of the LORD, at the hand of Jezebel."

We know with what alacrity Jehu assumed his office, and set about the discharge of its stern and bloody duties; how he drove furiously to slay Joram, assailing him the while with loud reproaches for tolerating the wicked doings of Jezebel; how he caused Ahaziah, king of Judah, to be slain; how he commanded Jezebel to be thrown from the window, and trod her under foot; how he effected the wholesale slaughter of seventy persons of King Ahab's sons, of all his great men, and his kinsfolks, and his priests, until he left him none remaining; and how, too, returning from this destruction, he met forty-two of the brethren of King Ahaziah, and caused them all to be slain at the pit of the shearing house. The words of the text introduce us to his last recorded deed of this kind, namely, the destruction by subtlety of all the followers of Baal, and the suppression of his worship throughout the land of Israel.

In reading this narrative, the questions na-

turally arise, How far were the deeds of Jehu a performance of the Divine will? Was Jehu in any respect, and if so, in what, a holy character? Under what influence did he act, and forbear to act? May we consider these questions rightly, and learn from them lessons of wisdom by GOD'S grace to be carried out into holy practice!

There is, then, no doubt, because we may read the command for it, in plain words, that GOD willed the destruction of Ahab's whole house and the extermination of the abominable idolatry of the Zidonians. Jehu seems, indeed, to have been unnaturally ready for the executioner's office, to have discharged it savagely, and to have availed himself of what is never needed or allowed in GOD'S service, of subtlety, fraud, lying: but still, making allowance for excesses, arising from his natural disposition, from his professional familiarity with deeds of blood, and probably from a proud misconception of the authority under which he acted, it must be admitted that, in the main, Jehu so far did the will of the LORD.

Under what influence, prompted by what feelings, he did it, is a question less easy to answer decidedly. There are some—and not a few—who say that his animus was altogether bad; that carnage was his delight; and that he wickedly,

and for his own pleasure and private ends, availed himself of the Divine commission, and served himself under the pretence of serving GOD. That Jehu was selfish there is great reason to believe, and something shall be said on that head presently; but that he was a hypocrite, that his principle, the motive under which he acted, was wholly bad, is proved not to be the case by the inspired commendation of him. GOD has made even the wicked for Himself, He uses them to accomplish His purposes (as He did the Assyrians to punish the Israelites, Satan to try Job, Judas to betray our LORD); but in such cases as they do of freely devised wickedness, what He overrules for His own good purposes, He condemns and punishes them for their offence, though He makes use of it. Now, in Jehu's case, He praised and rewarded, and so there must have been something right in him: "And the LORD said unto Jehu, Because thou hast done well in executing that which is right in mine eyes and hast done unto the house of Ahab according to all that was in mine heart, thy children of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel." And the promise was fully realised.

It seems clear, then, that Jehu's deeds not only accomplished the Divine will, but that they were

done with that design; in obedience and in zeal. They were a soldier's exact observance of orders, they were the fruits of a servant's devotion to his master.

We should be able to leave this statement without qualification were it not for two passages in the chapter of the text: the one, that in which Jehu makes such boastful mention of his doings, "Come with me, and see my zeal for the LORD;" the other, that in which the inspired writer records, "Howbeit from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, Jehu departed not from after them, to wit, the golden calves that were in Bethel, and that were in Dan." From the first of these we are compelled to infer that there was an evil leaven pervading his best obedience; and from the last, that other feelings often influenced him beside zeal for GOD, and other lords had dominion over him; so that he wilfully desisted or was deterred from doing all that was required of him. Hence it is plain that we must revise our estimate of his character, to account both for his zeal and want of zeal.

The most satisfactory way of viewing him, to make him at all consistent, is to suppose that, after all he was not a changed and converted man, and did not act from spiritual feelings; but that

he was hitherto employed in pursuits congenial to his natural taste, and so found his own pleasure in doing the LORD'S. In the destruction of Ahab's race and the overthrow of Baal, the soldier exercised the profession which he had chosen and loved. In daring exploits and deeds of blood, he found a carnal gratification. Moreover, he was all the while strengthening and advancing his own cause. His throne was unsafe while any of Ahab's posterity survived to dispute it with him, his people's allegiance was not sure while there was any link with the Zidonians remaining; and the LORD'S displeasure at the idolatry of Israel, he well knew, would show itself again, as it had done before, in the withholding of prosperity from them, and allowing them to be harassed by their enemies. It was, then, a congenial and politic course which he had hitherto followed. It may have been done with greater ardour and satisfaction, because it was the LORD'S will; Jehu may not at the time have had any distinct perception of the workings of a lower motive, but still he would, doubtless, have done all, and done it as readily and effectually had he owned no allegiance to GOD, and received no Divine command. This view of Jehu seems to be corroborated by the fact, that when the time was

come for him to serve GOD in comparative quietness, he served Him not; and when the performance of the Divine will in rooting out schism, threatened to break up the separation of Israel from Judah, by restoring the worship at Jerusalem, then he not only desisted from the work of reformation, but gave his countenance to the old error, and encouraged the people to go after the golden calves, that were in Bethel and that were in Dan. And so that which he would have others consider, and which, perhaps, he even believed himself, was zeal for GOD, was chiefly the indulgence of his own passions and the service of self; and it came to pass, that he who had done well, even according to all that was in GOD'S heart, henceforth took no heed to walk in the law of the LORD GOD of Israel.

Such was Jehu's zeal—a natural, or mixed, if not wholly selfish zeal, the zeal of Saul who sought to slay the Gibeonites, but spared Agag alive; the zeal of the chief priests and Pharisees who put CHRIST to death, and demanded Barabbas to be released; not the zeal of Phinehas, of Josiah, of Him who was always straitened till He did His Father's will; zeal not so much immoderate or blind, as blemished and partial; not being always zealously affected in a good work.

The review of such a character may be very profitable. How many of us, my brethren, are very warm, very exact in serving GOD, in the things to which we are naturally inclined? How many of us, if we bid not others (as we too often do), "Come with me, and see my zeal for the LORD," at least flatter, and puff up ourselves, in the contemplation of the service which we are rendering to GOD? How many of us have only just as much zeal as squares with our own desires or interests; and in all else, either desist when GOD urges "Go on," or persevere when He cries "Forbear!" The zealous man has been advised, by a great moralist, always to suspect that pride, or interest, or ill temper, is at the bottom of his zeal. Provided we guard against the grave error, so prevalent in the last century, of despising and condemning all religious zeal, it is well to entertain this suspicion—of ourselves, I mean—till we have proved it to be false, or by repentance and amendment have made it false. For who does not know how much a proud, carnal, selfish, ill-tempered man or woman may do in the service of self, which has the appearance of zeal for GOD? What pious labours men will undertake, if they happen to be in the path of their natural inclinations! What warfare they will wage against

sins that they have no mind to! What platform speeches they will make, what pamphlets or letters publish, against the disciples of a religious school to which they do not belong! They are zealously affected; they come out and are separate; they are enthusiastic, energetic, noisy; they put forth all their own strength; they invoke the civil power; they would have authority from the synagogue, if it were to be had, to punish all who do not conform; they smite with the sharp sword of a bitter persecuting tongue or pen; they work, they speak, they give, they fight, they endure—all, they say, in zeal for the LORD; and yet, if you follow them into the quiet scenes of life, if you come upon them where self has nothing to gain or enjoy, or where it has anything to lose or fear losing, to all appearance they take no heed to walk in the law of the LORD GOD. It is very likely that they are not communicants; that they are irregular in their attendance at Church, or greatly wanting in proper demeanour and devotion when there; that they aid but seldom, and slenderly, in the spread of religion around them, and the relief of GOD'S poor; that they are rarely seen to open the Bible; not men of prayer; exhibiting tempers, and following ways which belong not to the holily zealous; tolerating beneath their own

roof, or within the reach of their influence, something as hateful in the sight of GOD as the calves that were in Bethel and that were in Dan.

O how many who are zealous at one time, are without zeal at another! How many who make a great show of religion, and talk much about it, and contend in public for it, are utter strangers to its real influence, are wholly without love for it! How many, too, who honestly consider themselves zealous for GOD, are only serving Him in the bent of their natural inclinations, and taking no heed to Him, where self must be denied; like men of cold temperament, despising bodily indulgence, yet making a god of mammon; prodigals, inveighing against covetousness; destroyers of the temple of Baal, restorers of the calves of Bethel and Dan; saints in some things, devils in others!

O ye who boast of zeal, or claim to have it, take care that ye have it towards GOD, and that ye are constant in it! Distrust the energy which works only at times, and in some directions. Suspect the feeling which excites and fills with ardour to-day, but is listless and dead to-morrow; which chooses for itself what to do for GOD, what to think of GOD, what truth to meditate on chiefly, what practice alone to follow. Zeal for GOD is entire,

regular, consistent devotion to Him. It fills the whole man with all spiritual desires and feelings; it works out in the whole life; albeit, it is generally calm, and sober, and quiet, not boasting nor thrusting itself forward, not making much ado.

Do not suppose, brethren, that in speaking thus on the subject of zeal, I would discourage, in any degree, the entertaining of a fervent spirit, or would allow, for a moment, that strong feeling and strong expression of it, and manifested earnest activity, are, in the slightest degree, incompatible with real religion. On the contrary, I would maintain that there is no religion at all in the man or woman who is not—allowing for the differences of temperament—stirred within by it, and impelled to speak of and act upon it; who is afraid, or unwilling, or negligent, to show it. Zeal, I maintain, is good—nay, is necessary; zeal, which makes one burn with the glowing thought of immortality, which rouses one to ardent work and holy contention; which finds, and *must have*, its vent in the speech; which shows itself designedly, that it may impress others, and set forth the glory of God. Only, I would have you judge of that zeal in others, and find it in yourselves; not in what Jehu did, but in what he omitted, and ought to have done; not in that which indulges natural

desires, but in that which crosses them; not in that which secures worldly advantages, but in that which disregards, and even sacrifices them; not in that which exists, or is quickened only in times and places of excitement, but which burns brightest and highest, and spreads farthest, in solitude and silence; not where there is immediate praise, or glory, or notoriety, in the sight of men, but in that which is seen alone by God. Seek to be zealous, rest not till you are zealous, for there is no service of God, no acceptance with Him but through zeal: but expect to find your zeal, know that there only God will find it, in your deep conviction of sin, in the fervour of your penitence, in the uncompromising persecution of your own lusts, in the crossing of your own will, in the refraining from that you would naturally choose to do, and the performance of that you shrink from through worldly motives, in the earnestness of your prayers, in the frequency of your acts of communion, in the diligence of your searching of the Scriptures, in the munificence of your private charities, in the strenuousness of your efforts to do good to others, in the secret contemplation and desire of heaven, in the soul's appreciation of your high calling, in faithful love of God in your hearts! Have such zeal, and manifest and ex-

ercise it as often and as consistently as the Holy Spirit enables you, and then the whole of your life, within and without, from first to last, shall have the commendation which Jehu's at the beginning had; and an infinitely better promise shall be fulfilled to you, Ye shall sit on the throne of heaven with CHRIST, and reign with Him for ever and ever.

SERMON XIX.

CHRIST'S COMING DESIRED.

REVELATION, XXII., 20.

Even so, come, LORD JESUS.

AS it was the common belief of the early disciples that CHRIST was to come in His glorious Majesty, to render unto every man according to his works, so was it a common desire, a frequent prayer, that He would come quickly. They were not content with being merely mindful of the fact that He would come at some time, they were not merely anxious to be prepared, lest He should come soon; but they looked for His coming, they hasted towards it, they loved the thought of His appearing. Some of them, expecting that they should not taste of death till He had actually appeared to them in His fullest glory, looked ever with eager eyes for the opening of the heavens, and the revelation of the Son of

Man: others, believing that it was through the gates of death that they should enter into CHRIST's presence and realise His Second Advent, wished to die, courted death, yea, hardly resigned themselves to the Divine will, that they should as yet continue in the flesh.

Perhaps you may think that this was a natural rather than a spiritual frame of mind. On earth their portion had all along been one of sorrow and suffering, and evil reproach; and prophecy bade them look on for aggravations of what they already endured, and for many additional and greater troubles. What wonder, then, that they struggled to escape from the present, that they shrunk from the future, that they prayed that CHRIST would speedily come to them, or that He would speedily take them to Himself! What wonder that St. Paul, for instance, amid his toils, and perils, and sufferings, and revilings, and failures, and disappointments, with the prospect of nothing on earth but sorer persecution and greater trials, should desire to be absent from the body, and to be present with the LORD! What wonder that St. John, so cruelly entreated by foes, so disregarded by should-be friends, when in the isle of his banishment the voice of his LORD *told of* His speedy coming, should promptly and

ardently respond to Him, "Even so, come, LORD JESUS." Having nothing, and expecting nothing that flesh could desire; enduring much, anticipating more that was undesirable, grievous, hateful, what wonder, you would ask, that they yearned in their hearts to be delivered from such bondage, and to be transferred to the abode of peace and glory: that they offered frequently and fervently those Advent prayers, "Thy kingdom come," "LORD JESUS receive my Spirit," "Even so, come, LORD JESUS"! Even had they expected no hereafter, had they supposed that the coming Judge would annihilate them, or that the grave would bury them in eternal forgetfulness, it would still have been natural for them to have courted and prayed for the cessation of toil and the end of suffering.

So some persons are wont to reason. It is natural, they say, for those to whom this world is a blank or a sea of troubles, to set their hopes on another world. It is natural for those whose life here is all weariness, to be desirous to give up that life, even though they shall have no life hereafter.

But is it really natural? Does affliction naturally make us look heavenwards? Does a troubled life naturally reconcile us to the thought of

speedy death, yea, and cause us to desire it, to pray for it?

On the contrary, do we not often find persons unspiritualised by affliction? Do not many maintain that their worldly troubles are the hindrance of religious thought and practice? Is not death by very instinct shrunk from by well-nigh all, and most by those whose circumstances seem to recommend it as naturally the greatest good?

You hear those who are vexed or thwarted, or oppressed, or wearied, exclaim in some moment of impatience or despondency, "I am weary of my life." You find some so worn out, like Job, by long and accumulated troubles, that they continually sigh, and from the heart, "Oh! that I had given up the ghost!" You hear the thoughtless, the proud, the obstinate, protest "I had rather die." But let them be taken at their word, let Death show himself to be really close at hand, to be coming to them, and they will recoil with horror from his touch, and piteously cry to be spared. Occasionally one is found who, lacking patience and perseverance to extricate himself lawfully from pressing difficulties, or, mad with vexation because he cannot accomplish some worldly scheme, or because he has been frustrated in some wickedness; or because having

done the wickedness, he fears to face the worldly consequences of his deed, not merely says that he wishes to die, and prays for death; but then and there ministers it to himself. Yet even in such cases, while he would escape from life, he does not deliberately seek death. Nay, when he finds he is encountering death, he often desists from his half-done deed, or, if it be too late for that, shrieks frantically for others to rescue him.

There are exceptions to all these rules, when men really wish to die, when they deliberately court and procure death; but they are sufficiently rare to vindicate the truth, that they are not natural.

Certainly the desire and prayer of the first disciples to be removed from this world were not natural. They did not despair in difficulties. They were not unwilling to endure continued trials and sufferings. They were not disgusted with life. All that CHRIST required of them they burned to do; all that He laid upon them they rejoiced to bear; and while aught was undone or unsuffered, they chose and desired to remain; and even then, it was not exhausted nature asking for rest, it was not weariness or dislike of life's lot which prompted the prayer, "Even so, come, LORD JESUS:" they gloried in their then vocation, they

loved their appointed work; they would not relinquish it, they would not be unclothed, but clothed upon, advanced, and perfected: they loved CHRIST, and so yearned to see Him; they loved His service, and so coveted a state in which it could be more fully and uninterruptedly rendered; they loved other men, the alien and the outcast, and so longed for the day when all the kingdoms of the world should become the kingdoms of the LORD and of His CHRIST, when every soul should be subject to and rejoice in His rule! They looked for CHRIST'S coming, not because they supposed it would release them from His service, and transfer them to an abode of luxurious immunity and rest and glory; but because they thought it was the necessary prelude to full usefulness, to entire submission to His will, to unremitted, glorious service under His perceived eye, and in the perfection of His strength. They thought death was gain, and they desired it, not as the time of sleep, the chamber of inactivity and oblivion, but as the door, the short passage, which led into a world wherein the kingdom of CHRIST was fully set up, and wherein they should unceasingly experience His rule, and act as its agents. They prayed that GOD would shortly accomplish the number of His elect, not with the carnal desire

that their enemies might be confounded, and that those then without might be kept without: nor yet with selfish impatience for their own promised reward; but that the work of grace might be effectual, where now it seemed to be received in vain; that the darkness which encompassed so many might be dispelled, that all Israel might be saved, and might join them in glorifying GOD.

This was the feeling which prompted their Advent prayers; this was the feeling which they laboured to arouse in those to whom they spoke, and in us, for whom they wrote. When St. Paul tells us, that to him to live was CHRIST, and to die was gain, that he desired to depart and be with CHRIST, though he was content to remain? he shows one of the many respects in which we are to be followers of him. When St. John records, that he replied to CHRIST'S announcement, "Behold, I come quickly," "Even so, come, LORD JESUS," he personates the Church and every acceptable member of it, and shows us the attitude and the feeling which becomes each one of those who wait for the LORD'S appearing; even as St. Peter does in direct appeal: "What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of GOD?"

Alas! brethren, how far are we below the appointed standard of acceptable discipleship! How little is CHRIST'S Second Advent in our minds, even as a mere doctrine, a truth of Scripture! How small is the influence which it is allowed to exercise on our thoughts and affections, and lives! How seldom do we suggest to ourselves the possibility of its nearness! How faintly, if at all, in what mere words—words, which do not spring from feelings, and are not illustrated by actions—do we pray for its speedy arrival!

Even those among us, who are rightly mindful, who study to be prepared at all times, lest speedily and suddenly the Son of Man should come forth to judgment, or should send forth the angel of death to bring them to His bar—even these can scarcely be said to desire the coming, which they think of and prepare for: much less to pray for it, and to do what in them lies to hasten it. Even if we are faithful servants, able to render a right account whenever it shall be called for, we dread rather than hope for the day of our LORD'S return. Even if we have our lamps trimmed and oil with us in our vessels, if instead of slumbering, we are watching, would it not still be to us an unwelcome cry, "Behold the bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet Him"?

What would be the first feeling of the best of us, if at this moment an angel stood revealed, and announced "The day of the LORD is come"? which of us can honestly, heartily say now, "I would not live always. I would not live till to-morrow, if GOD graciously willed that I might die to-day?"

Of course there are many reasons why we should shrink from an immediate advent. We all of us need to cast off some works of darkness: something is wanting in the spiritual armour of the best accoutred. We feel that we have much work to do for GOD before the night cometh; we have many graces to cultivate and many others to acquire, before we shall be fit for CHRIST'S coming; and, besides, naturally, the unprovided for, the unprotected, the unguided, that will be left behind, if we go, tempt us to linger, with eyes earthwards; and fashion chains to bind us down. But setting aside all this, supposing it all changed, so that we were fit in all other respects for heaven, and nothing and no one on earth really required us, does not conscience convince us that still we would rather not go yet, that we shall be the better pleased the longer we are allowed to stay, that our real prayer (that which our feelings suggest, though our mouths dare not utter it, nor our

minds dwell on it) is "LORD JESUS, come *not* quickly."

Why is this? I do not mean why is it in the case of the wilful, the sensual, the worldly—there is no need to ask the question of them; CHRIST'S coming will be their utter confusion, and the immediate forerunner of their destruction. It is easy to understand why *they* wish him to delay. But why is it in the case of the truly penitent, the reformed, the faithful, the holy, the comparatively ready for CHRIST'S kingdom of glory? The foremost reason seems to be that they have never had the courage to meditate calmly and sufficiently on death. The first thought of death alarms them. And this is natural, for death is part of the punishment of sin, and all that reminds of sin should alarm. But it is only the *first* thought that alarms. If they would give it further consideration, they would see that death is deprived of his sting, that, monster as he appears, to them he is harmless. "There is no condemnation for them that are in CHRIST JESUS." Death is not their enemy, but their friend. In fact, he is death no longer. He is an appointed minister to take them out of what might be more properly called death—this mortal life—and introduce them into real life. He does *not* separate them from CHRIST, but joins them

more truly to Him. It is not a dark, bottomless pit, with sides that cannot be climbed, to which he brings them, but a short valley leading from the plain of this world to the city of glory, which he that enters passes through in a moment, ay, and less than a moment, and is new born for eternity. Bring yourselves, brethren, to believe this, to feel the reality of it, to be sure that the moment your body falls asleep in JESUS your spirit is wafted to Paradise, and begins to rest consciously on CHRIST, and to company with the spirits of the just departed. Then, though the nearness of death may for the moment awe you—because it is the antechamber which leads directly into the presence of so much holiness and glory—it will have no power to fill you with dismay, no undesirableness to make you shrink from it. No, brethren, you will think much of it, you will patiently hope for it, you will anticipate it and watch for it, and when it draws nigh, you will welcome it with joy, and hasten to be transferred by it from mortal life to immortal!

Another fault is, that CHRIST is not sufficiently in all our thoughts. Our religion is too much of mere routine; our obedience is mechanical, unintelligent; our holiness is acquired, because of an imposed necessity; our faith is but historical.

We do not feel what St. Paul felt when he said, "To me to live is CHRIST." By which it is clear he meant much more than that CHRIST'S service was his one employment, CHRIST'S rewards his one expectation, CHRIST'S grace his only strength. He did not simply look back to a crucified Saviour, nor forward to a coming Judge, believing himself to be made a servant, and to have by and by to render an account, to be liable to a judgment of his service; but meanwhile to have no LORD near and over him. No! the CHRIST that had departed in the flesh was felt to have come back in the spirit. St. Paul saw Him by faith, knew Him, walked side by side with Him, served Him personally, derived constant grace from Him, loved Him, and felt His love. CHRIST was the Alpha and Omega of his being, the beginning, the motive power of all his thoughts, and words, and deeds, the companion of all his ways, the object of all his aims: CHRIST the power of GOD unto salvation, CHRIST a very present help and comfort, CHRIST the hope of glory. Life was full of CHRIST in its experiences, its aims, its delights, and hopes. Gladly, therefore, would he retain it as long as GOD willed; but knowing that death was gain, that after death CHRIST would be more palpably with him, that he would be more able

to appreciate CHRIST, that heavenly joys would then be added to the joys he had on earth, he still longed for his departure, he desired ardently to be clothed upon, he loved the thought of CHRIST's final appearing, and his whole life acted the prayer which St. John uttered, "Come, LORD JESUS."

Brethren, you must live as Paul did, you must appreciate life as he did, if you would desire death as he did. You must acquaint yourselves with CHRIST by study and meditation, by the Spirit's invoked aid. You must think of a living LORD as well as of a dead Saviour. You must have reference in all your ways, not only to the first advent and to the last, but, also, and I would even say chiefly, to the constant advent. You must have come to perceive that the promise is fulfilled, "Lo, I am with you alway." You must endure as seeing Him who is invisible. You must carry CHRIST about with you. You must do all to the glory of Him, felt to be near, to be served and glorified. When you would go anywhither, your first thought must be, "Will CHRIST accompany me? Except thy presence go with me, O LORD, carry me not up hence." When you have aught to do or suffer, your realisation of a near and available helper must make you begin with

the prayer, "O LORD, raise up thy power and come among us, and with great might succour us." Gratitude for benefits provided so long ago will never prompt you to render due Christian service, vague expectation of inconceivable joys will never quicken your steps Zionwards. You must know CHRIST, feel Him, converse with Him, depend on Him, and then, while you enjoy the life here, you will yet yearn for a place and a condition where you can have perfectly and uninterruptedly what now for so many reasons you have but in small part, and, "Thy kingdom come," "Even so, come, LORD JESUS," will be your fervent and frequent prayers.

I have spoken all along as if what we call "death" were the coming of CHRIST, which you ought to desire and pray for, because we have all come to take for granted that in our several cases death will surely precede judgment, that CHRIST will not be revealed in our time. I need scarcely remind you, that we do not know that; that at any moment the final advent might take place, and so each one of us be caught up alive—and never see death. If then, when you desire more of CHRIST, you think that through the gate of death is the probable way of gaining it, and so look for death, you must not forget that there is another

way, and that you may possibly first meet CHRIST face to face there. Be your desire to be more fully with CHRIST, and submissively leave to Him to decide how that desire shall be accomplished, through death or without death. But in either case remember that your ultimate thought should rest upon the final advent, and your most fervent prayers be for it. Though you gain much by dying, being freed from many hindrances of perception of CHRIST, being made more fit for His presence, seeing Him more clearly, feeling, and hearing, and loving Him better, your state and privileges will still be imperfect. You must stand before Him in glorified bodies before you are capable of being and receiving all that He graciously designs; and all the elect must stand there with you before His perfect gifts shall be bestowed. God does not will that we, without them, should be made perfect. The final advent, then, is to be the frequent subject of our prayers; the speedy completion of all God's preparatory measures, the swiftest communication, far and wide, of the knowledge of His name and will, the quick filling up of the number of the elect.

This we are to pray for, and this we are to aid in accomplishing. CHRIST will come when all is ready, and He has left us to make ready. First

to prepare ourselves, then to prepare others. When this work of the forerunner has been done, the LORD Whom ye seek will come. He does but tarry till men be told of His coming, and persuaded to look for and desire it. When we tell them, when we persuade them, we hasten His coming—that coming in perfect glory to bestow in perfection on us, on all, that which, till then, at the best must be imperfect.

Should not this quicken our own growth in spiritual things? should it not prompt us to admonish, and persuade, and help others? should it not impel us to give more substantial aid to, to interest ourselves more about, to pray more frequently and really for the success of missionary enterprise, that those who have heard of CHRIST may be found out in their forgetfulness, and reminded of Him, that those who are as yet strangers and aliens may be brought into His household, and made fellow heirs with us, and expectants of His coming?

SERMON XX.

TRUE PROSPERITY.

GENESIS, XXXIX., 2.

The LORD *was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man.*

IF you were asked, brethren, to make a list of what you consider prosperous men, what kind of persons what you put into it? Those, I doubt not, with whom all goes smoothly, who come in no misfortune like other folk, who have riches in possession, acquire fame, are exalted in honour; whose wishes are largely gratified, whose every project succeeds; who, in short, experience no reverse, no temporary withdrawal or suspension of good fortune, and peace, and pleasure. What is the first prosperous man that comes into your mind? Perhaps, a successful speculator, who years ago made what is called a "lucky hit," and has gone on repeating it, till he has become a

millionaire. Perhaps, a professional man, whom fortune took by the hand as soon as he set out, and who has been hurried along with giant strides, favoured, flattered, well remunerated, till he has reached the summit of success. Perhaps, some uniformly thriving, respectable, happy tradesman, whose business prospers, who is always able to pay his way, can afford time and money for pleasure, and has good heart and health to enjoy it; in whose household there is no strife or division, no sickness, no vacated place; all present success, or bright hope. Or, perhaps, you fasten on an artisan, who is never out of work, who always meets with considerate and liberal employers, whose sobriety and uprightness, and other good qualities, are recognised and respected abroad, and rewarded by comfort, and affection, and well-doing at home.

But it is a clergyman who bids you select: so you must look about with a religious eye. Then you pick out, perhaps, those who are naturally endowed with good will and resolution, and are strong to perform it; who have been early trained in the right way, so that doing good has become habitual and comparatively easy; who have no overwhelming concern about the support of their lower life, are not distracted by worldly cares or

by the claims of society upon them, nor much exposed to unspiritual influence; who have no immoderate passions, encounter no sore temptations, but *can*, without hindrance, and *do*, from desire, live calm, and easy, and creditable lives. These, you would say, are prosperous men, and so, in a sense, they are—very prosperous—and far be it from me to say, wrongly, or unhappily prosperous. We know, indeed, what snares riches bring with them, how many grave responsibilities are imposed upon all to whom much has been given, how dizzy one becomes through standing on a great height, and how easy and dangerous it is to fall from it. We know, too, that constant success is apt to make us self-reliant, forgetful of God, proud, imperious, uncharitable; and that uninterrupted peace and happiness in this world too often beguile us, softly indeed, but surely, out of all thought of heaven. And once more, we know that an even temperament and an untempted life may easily lead to routine-religion, to self-righteousness, to spiritual apathy and deadness. On these accounts, we must not count them *surely* happy who prosper in the world; but, on the other hand, we may not judge their state certainly unhappy; nor deem the desire to be like them necessarily wrong or unwise. *If* we can make

sure of both worlds; *if* we can have the best of this, and not lose the other; *if* no harm will happen to our spiritual state, and no fitness for it be unattained and unkept; *if* GOD will be surely with us, while we *thus* prosper—then religion does not require, rather forbids, that we should give up our good things, that we should forbear to seek them, to use them, and to rejoice in them. All these various states may, or may not be, truly prosperous. Wherefore be not rashly carried away with admiration and desire of any of them; be slow to judge unfavourably of them, or to refuse, if you be called to any of them.

But what I would have you chiefly note now is that there are other kinds of true prosperity; rather, that if you would find out who truly prosper, and whether you yourselves are truly prosperous, you must look for other signs than those of worldly success and happiness; you must not conclude that the inward part, the very substance of prosperity, is wanting, because the outward life is sorely tried, and thwarted, and deprived, and saddened.

The Spirit of Truth describes, in the chapter of the text, a truly prosperous man. Three several times, in a few verses, is Joseph's prosperity put prominently forward. Now just think what his

life had been, and was, and was yet to be! He had been motherless from an early age; his father's love made him the object of his brothers' envy and hatred. He was thrown into a pit to die, and only escaped death to become a slave in a foreign land to a heathen master. Ere long he was made the victim of a foul accusation; he was thrust into prison, and there detained many long years; and when, at last, a hope of deliverance dawned upon him, he was cruelly disappointed by the king's servant, whom he had kindly tended and reassured in trouble, and another two years of incarceration, of suspense worse than despair, had to be endured! Yet was he *all the while*—mark that!—a prosperous man. The Scripture does not say or mean that *by and by* he attained to a prosperity, in which all his former adversity was forgotten. It is of the present, not of the future, that prosperity is predicated. Nor may we suppose that there was but a *show* of adversity, that Joseph was really what we call prosperous all the while, in that he enjoyed many advantages, that he made steady way towards greatness, that his troubles were but as the toils and difficulties which, in a measure, the most successful have to encounter; or the just merits of misdeeds and the correction of faults. Up to the time of his release

from prison, all through the years which Scripture says were prosperous, every hope and aim had been frustrated. It was not that he had difficulty in entering upon his work, that he had much to resist and suffer from its pursuit; but that after it was done, the reward of it was denied him: he only climbed the hill, to be rolled back, just as he reached the summit. His child's life commended him to the love of his father, *therefore* he was thrust out. He won the good-will of his master, was diligent in his work, which prospered in his hand; was trustworthy and trusted, rose to be overseer of the house, and *then*, when he had good hope of his freedom and of returning to his yearned-for home, without any fault of his, he was degraded, branded with infamy, and cast into prison. Here, again, he deserved prosperity: the very jailor acknowledged it, and honoured and well treated him. The door, too, seemed to be opening for his deliverance, when a fellow-prisoner went forth full of his praise, an eye-witness of his sorrow, to make mention of him to Pharaoh—but alas! the most strange forgetfulness took possession of the butler, and for two years the name of Joseph never crossed his lips, nor thought of him entered his mind. And even when delivered out of prison, and exalted by Pharaoh, he became but

a chief *slave*, next the throne in dignity, second to the king in power, but still not free to return to his home, still kept ignorant whether his father was yet alive! Was this what we can call, by any stretch or limitation, "prosperity"? And mark, that all his trouble came upon him, not only *in*, but *for*, his well-doing. In obedience to his father, he went to visit his brethren, and thus afforded the occasion of selling him into bondage; because he did his duty to Potiphar, he was put into circumstances of danger; by refusing to sin against GOD, he incurred the reproach and punishment of sin; by honestly asserting before Pharaoh, "It is not in me, I am nothing but a servant," he lost the opportunity of obtaining what the king would have been most ready to give him, and afraid to refuse, absolute freedom.

My brethren, you and I can hardly bear with trials, and sufferings, and reproaches, and ill-treatment, when we dimly suspect, or are actually conscious, that we have deserved them. How should we murmur, and cry out, and kick, and rebel, if we were thus treated for well-doing! With what words should we answer him who sought to calm and comfort us in such trouble, by assuring us that we did wrong to count it adversity, that it was indeed prosperity!

Yet GOD says that Joseph was a prosperous man. It is evident, therefore, that we know not the meaning of prosperity, and must search in His dictionary for the interpretation of it. It is soon found: the first part of the text supplies it—"*The* LORD *was with him.*"

Ah! here is light from heaven. Prosperity does not mean the state of careless independence; being what we will, having what we desire, accomplishing what we propose: it means, the state of dependence, of being kept and ordered by GOD'S providence, treated as He wills, used in accomplishing His purposes. *By right*, we are GOD'S, by creation, and redemption, and sanctification, sent into this world, reconciled and restored after defection, enabled and commissioned to do the will of GOD. We are as much the agents of His purposes as the elements, or any other of His creatures; and it would be just as reasonable, were it possible, for the sun to complain that it is sometimes covered with clouds; the rain, that it has to descend and be absorbed in the earth, or lost in the sea, or scattered in snow; the wind, that it must blow when and where He pleases, as for us to say of any state into which we are brought, of any work to which we are put, or of any calling off from it, "I like not this; I am

not prospered. All these things are against me"! We have no right to independence; we ought not to be independent, and if we are, it is either because we have forsaken our appointed service, or because GOD deems us unfit for it, and, therefore, uses us not! A chief part of Joseph's prosperity, remember, consisted not in the advancement of himself, but in the accomplishment of GOD'S work: "*That which he did*, the LORD made it to prosper."

But *by privilege*, as well as by right, are we GOD'S. We are not mere tools in His hand: we are living agents, intelligent to understand His will, free to do it or decline it, capable of loving it. We are, therefore, taken into His counsel, made fellow-workers with Him, treated all along by Him according to our merits, finally rewarded according to our work; not, however, in the way of our own choice, but of His. O if we realised this, and did our part according to the belief, we should never murmur at, or question anything that is appointed us, or befals us. For what does such questioning amount to, but an assertion that GOD does not make the right use of us, or that He does not treat us worthily? And what is that, but to deny His wisdom, His justice, and His love? No man, who is worth a thought, counts it

adversity, that he is bound by the conditions, and must accept the trials, and do the work of his chosen earthly calling, that he is obliged, for instance, to serve in his shop, or pore over his books, or risk storms at sea, or face the dangers of war; that, in short, he cannot be and do what he will, but must obey the law of circumstances—why, then, should he reverse all this in his divine mission and heavenly calling, and demand a liberty, an immunity, a choice, which common sense would tell him should not and could not be granted?

But there is another, a chief consideration, which should incline us to be sure that the ordering of GOD'S providence is the conferring of True Prosperity. GOD uses us, indeed, as servants, and appoints us our individual work out of the several circumstances around us. But He likewise makes us His friends, and uses the circumstances around us, as ministers to us. It is in them that He speaks to us and visits us; it is by them that He rewards and punishes us now; it is through them that He disciplines and trains us, and perfects us for heaven. We were not made for them, but they for us. And what shall we be saying of the Artificer and the Superintendent of their use if we question their general fitness, or the special application of them to ourselves?

"Sorrow is not good for me." "I am ruined by that disappointment." "Through taking that stay from me, I am become helpless." "Removing me thither is overwhelming me with adversity." These, my brethren, are not only the expressions of ingratitude, and the reasonings of unbelief, they are the dictations of arrogant presumption dethroning the wisdom of GOD, and putting our folly in its place. We have no right to choose for ourselves: and if we had, how could we do it? Is not GOD wise to know what is best for us? Is not He good to apply it? Should we not fear the fulfilment of any hope, the accomplishment of any purpose of our own, and cry, "O LORD, not as I will, but as Thou wilt. Except Thy presence go with me, carry me not up hence"! Should we not accept with full resignation, with heartfelt gratitude, any imposed condition, and say, "It is the LORD, let Him do what seemeth Him good," "It is good for me to be here."

We may reason this out, and the example of others proves it, and our own experience confirms it. Admit the fact, that the LORD was with Joseph, *i. e.*, that He used him as His agent, that He loved him, and designed to deliver him from evil, and to bless him to the uttermost; and then look along his life to see whether wisdom and love

did not guide all his circumstances to this end. It was GOD's will that Joseph should cause Jacob to come into Egypt, and should sustain him there. How every step of his seeming adversity helped to accomplish this will! The telling of his dream engendered the hatred of his brethren; that hatred sold him to the Midianites, the Midianites brought him to Potiphar, the false accusation cast him into prison, in the prison he interpreted the king's butler's dream, and therefore he was summoned to interpret the king's dream, and for so doing made the ruler of Egypt, and the dispenser of corn to the famished nations. This brought the sons of Jacob to him: this enabled him to dispose of them according to the will of GOD. Thus, "that which he did the LORD made it to prosper." And then of his personal prosperity. Was not his father's preference likely to spoil him? Did he not run daily risks from the hatred of his brethren? Was his best state that of an honoured slave in Potiphar's household? Was it well that he should daily encounter the temptations of his mistress? Was there no good discipline in that prison-life? Did not deliverance come at the fitting moment, rightly so late, under such circumstances? Supposing he had chosen for himself, what else could he have chosen that

would have been better, or as good as GOD'S choice for Him? And if, brethren, we look along *our* lives in the light of GOD'S providence, is it not just so with us? Supposing us to be faithful servants of GOD, has not all that has happened to us been for our good? Was it not well for us that we were removed from the state in which we were being spoiled, becoming selfish and proud? Was it not good for us to be afflicted? Did not some earthly loss make us seek to fill the void with heavenly consolation? Are we not now better—better in fact—better in hope—because GOD has prospered us in His own way, than if we had had what *we* thought prosperity? Yes, surely; and had we been wise, in the hour of our worst trial, we should have known that we were truly prosperous, in that GOD was with us, that His jealous love had taken us from the foolish fondness that was spoiling us, from the bitter envy that would not rest till it had destroyed us, from the secular prosperity that would soon have made us forget our birthright, from the temptation that sought to defile us!

If we have been wanting in this wisdom hitherto, let us fill ourselves with it now. Let us accept everything that befals us in the path of faith and obedience as true prosperity; true pros-

perity, not only because it is accomplishing by us GOD's wise purposes, not only because it is advancing us to glory, but because it is the felt, the immediate, wise, loving operation on us of a present GOD, present to sustain, to comfort, to sanctify, to bless, present under a better covenant than that with Joseph, present more graciously, and more effectually; GOD the Father of our LORD JESUS CHRIST, GOD the Son, who has given Himself for us, and has promised to be with us always even to the end of the world, GOD the Holy Ghost, proceeding from the Father and the Son, bringing near and applying true prosperity, and fitting us for it, and enlightening us to see it, and causing us to rejoice in it.

GLORY BE UNTO GOD.

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